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Weird Tales

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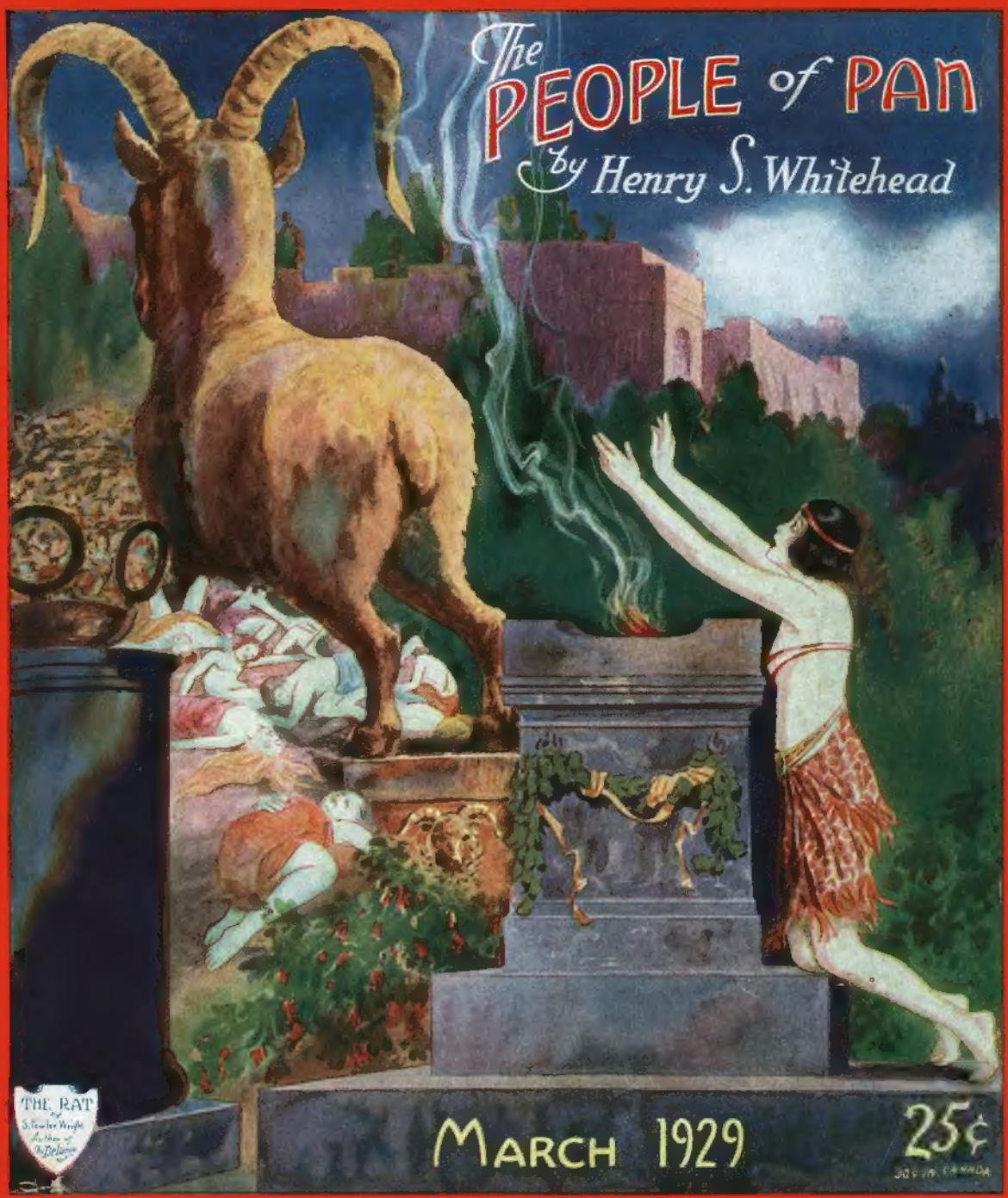

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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The PEOPLE of PAN

by Henry S. Whitehead

"She poured out upon the altar a thin stream of golden-colored oil."

I, GERALD CANEVIN of Santa Cruz, have actually been down the ladder of thirteen hundred and twenty-six steps set into the masonry of the Great Cylinder of Saona; have marveled at the vast cathedral underground on that tropical island; have trembled under the menacing Horns of the Goat.

That this island, comparable in area with my own Santa Cruz, and lying as it does only an overnight's sail from Porto Rico's metropolis, San Juan, quite near the coast of Santo Domingo, and skirted almost daily by the vessels of the vast Caribbean trade—that such an island should have remained unexplored until our own day is, to me, the greatest of its many marvels. Through his discovery, Grosvenor is today the world's richest man.

How, under these conditions, it could have been inhabited by a cultured race for centuries, is not hard, however, to understand. The cylinder—but the reader will see that for himself; I must not anticipate. I would note that the insect life has been completely re-established since Grosvenor's well-nigh incredible adventure there. I can testify! I received my first (and only) centipede bite while on Saona with Grosvenor, from whose lips I obtained the extraordinary tale which follows. . . .

"BUT," protested Grosvenor, "how about the lighthouse? Isn't there *anybody* there? Of course, I'm not questioning your word, Mr. Lopez!"

"Automatic light." The Insular Line agent spoke crisply. "Even the birds avoid Saona! Here—ask Hansen. Come here, will you, Captain?"

Captain Hansen of the company's

ship *Madeleine* came to the desk. "Vot iss it?" he asked, steely blue eyes taking in Charles Grosvenor.

"Tell Mr. Grosvenor about Saona, Captain. You pass it twice a week on your run to Santo Domingo. I won't say a word. You tell him!"

Captain Hansen lowered his bulk carefully into an office chair.

"It iss a funny place, Saona. Me, I'm neffer ashore there. Nothing to go ashore *for*. Flat, it iss; covered down to de beach with mahogany trees —millions of mahogany trees. Nodding else—only beach. On one end, a liddle peninsula, and de automatic light. Nobody iss dere. De Dominican gofferment sends a boat vunce a month with oil for de light. Dat's all I could tell you—trees, sand, a dead leffel; nobody dere."

The captain paused to light a long black cigar.

Grosvenor broke a silence. "I have to go there, Captain. I am agent for a company which has bought a mahogany-cutting concession from the Dominican government. I have to look the place over—make a survey. Mr. Lopez suggests that you put me ashore there on the beach."

"Goot! Any time you made de arrangement here in de office, I put you on shore dere, and—I'll go ashore with you! In all de Seffen Seas neffer yet did I meet a man had been ashore on Saona. I t'ink dat yoost happens so. Dere iss noddings to go ashore for; so, efferybody sails past Saona."

The captain rose, saluted the agent and Grosvenor gravely, and moved majestically toward the narrow stairs which led to the blazing sidewalk of San Juan below.

It required two weeks in *mañana*-land for Grosvenor to assemble his outfit for the sojourn on Saona. He was fortunate in discovering, out of work and looking for a job, a Barbadian negro who spoke English—the ancient island tongue of the buccaneers—and who labored under the name of Christian Fabio. Christian had been a ship's steward. He could cook, and like most Barbadians had some education and preferred long, polysyllabic words.

The *Madeleine* sailed out of San Juan promptly at 3 one blazing afternoon, with Grosvenor and Christian aboard.

Grosvenor had asked to be called at 6, and when he came on deck the next morning the land off the *Madeleine's* starboard side was the shore of Saona. The *Madeleine* skirted this low-lying shore for several hours, and Grosvenor, on the bridge deck, scanned the island with the captain's Zeiss glass. He saw one dense mass of mahogany trees, dwarfed by perspective, appearing little more impressive than bushes.

At eight bells Captain Hansen rang for half-speed, and brought the *Madeleine* to anchor off a small bay skirted by a crescent of coconut palms. Greensward indicated the mouth of a fresh-water stream, and for this point in the bay Captain Hansen steered the ship's boat, in which he accompanied Grosvenor and Christian ashore. They were followed by another and larger boat, loaded to the gunwales with their supplies.

The trees, seen now close at hand, were much larger than they had appeared from the ship's deck. A fortune in hardwood stood there, untouched it seemed for centuries, ready for the cutting.

As soon as the stores were unloaded, Captain Hansen shook hands gravely with Grosvenor, was rowed back to his ship, and the *Madeleine* was immediately got under weigh and proceeded on her voyage. Long before the taint of her smoke had faded into nothingness in the blazing glare of the tropic sun, the two marooned inhabitants of Saona had pitched their tents and were settled into the task of establishing themselves for several weeks' sojourn.

GROSVENOR started his explorations the next morning. His map of the island was somewhat sketchy. It did not show the slight rise toward the island's center which had been perceptible even from shipboard. Grosvenor's kit included an aluminum surveyor's transit, a thermos-flask of potato soup—one of the best of tropical foods—and the inevitable mosquito-net for the noon *siesta*.

He started along the line of the stream, straight inland. He was soon out of sight and hearing of his camp in a silence unbroken by so much as the hum of an insect. He found the trees farther inland, in the rich soil of centuries of undisturbed leafage, better grown than those nearer the sea. As they increased in size the sun's heat diminished.

Grosvenor walked along slowly. The stream, as he had expected, narrowed and deepened after a few rods of travel, and even a short distance inland, rinsing out his mouth with an aluminum cupful of the water, he found it surprizingly cool. This indicated shelter for a great distance and that the island must be very heavily forested.

A quarter of a mile inland he set up his transit, laid out a square, and counted the trees within it. The density of the wood was seventeen per cent greater than what the company had estimated upon. He whistled to himself with satisfaction. This promised a favorable report. He continued his walk inland.

Four times he laid out a similar square, counted the trees, measured the circumference of their bases a little above the ground, estimated their average height. The wood-area became steadily denser.

At 12:30 he stopped for lunch and a couple of hours' rest. It would take him less time to walk back because he would not have to stop to lay out his squares.

He drank his potato soup, ate two small sandwiches of sharp Porto Rico sausage, and boiled a cupful of the stream water over a sterno apparatus for tea.

Then he stretched himself out on the long grass of the stream's bank under his mosquito-netting. He drifted easily into sleep, to the accompaniment of the stream's small rustlings and the sough of the trade wind through the millions of small mahogany leaves.

He awakened, two hours later, a sense of foreboding heavily upon him. It was as though something weird and strange had been going on for some time—something of which he was, somehow, dimly conscious. As he started, uneasily, to throw off the net and get up, he noticed with surprize that there were no mosquitos on the net's outer surface. Then he remembered Captain Hansen's remarks about the dearth of animal life on the island. There was rarely even a seagull, the captain had said, along the island's shore. Grosvenor recalled that he had not seen so much as an insect during his five hours on the trail. He threw off the net and rose to his feet.

The vague sense of something obscurely amiss with which he had awakened remained. He looked curiously about him. He listened, carefully. All was silent except for the dying breath of the trade wind.

Then, all at once, he realized that he was missing the sound of the little stream. He stepped toward it and saw that the water had sunk to a mere trickle. He sat down near the low bank and looked at it. There were the marks of the water, more than a foot higher than its present level.

He glanced at his watch. It was 3:13. He had slept for two hours, exactly as he had intended. He might have slept the clock around! Even so, twenty-six hours would hardly account for a drop like this. He wound his watch—seven and one-half twists. It was the same day! He looked at the water again. It was dropping almost visibly, like watching the hour-

hand of a huge clock at close range. He stuck a twig at its present level, and started to roll up his net and gather his belongings into a pack. That finished, he lit a cigarette.

He smoked the cigarette out and went to look at his twig. The water was half an inch below it. The many slight sounds which make up the note of a brook were muted now; the little trickle of water gave off no sound.

Greatly puzzled, Grosvenor shouldered his pack and started back to camp.

The walk occupied an hour and a quarter. The water grew lower as he went downstream. Before he reached the edge of the mahogany forest it had dwindled into a shallow bit of fenland. At the edge of the coral sand it was quite dry. He found Christian getting supper and bubbling over with long words which emerged out of a puzzled countenance.

"Doubtless you have remarked the diminution of the stream," began Christian. "I was fortunate enough to observe its cessation two hours ago and I have filled various vessels with water. It will constitute a very serious menace to our comfort, sir, if we are deprived of water. We might signal the *Madeleine* on her return voyage tomorrow, but I fear that if the lowering of the stream is permanent we shall be obliged to ration ourselves as to ablutions!" Having delivered this masterpiece, Christian fell silent.

WHEN Grosvenor arose the next morning the stream was at the same level as on the previous morning. It was as though this stream were subject to a twenty-four-hour tide. There was no means of judging now whether this were the case, or whether some cataclysm of nature at the stream's source had affected it in this extraordinary way. Grosvenor's instinct was all for another trip upstream to the source to find out what he could.

He made more of his tree-tests that morning, and after lunch the stream began to fail again. The following morning it was once more at its high level. That day Grosvenor put his wish into execution. He had plenty of time for his surveys. He would go exploring on his own account today. He started after breakfast, taking only the materials for lunch this time. The mosquito-netting had proved to be useless. There were no mosquitos!

At 9 he reached the spot where he had taken the first *siesta*. He proceeded upstream, and half an hour later the ground began to rise. The stream shallowed and broadened. The trees in this moist area grew larger than any others he had seen on the island.

His pedometer informed him he was getting close to the island's center. The ground now mounted steadily. He came to a kind of clearing, where the trees were sparse and great whitish ricks replaced the soft coral soil. Through these, the stream, now again narrow and deep, ran a tortuous way, winding about the great boulders. On this broken ground, without much shade, the sun poured in intolerable brilliance. He wiped the sweat from his face as he climbed the last rise to the island's summit.

As he topped the rise an abrupt change took place. One moment he had been picking his way through broken ground among rocks. The next he was standing on smooth stone. He paused, and looked about him. He was at the top.

At his feet lay a smooth, round lake, enclosed by a stone parapet. Beyond, a gentle slope, heavily forested, ran down to the distant sea on the island's other side.

He stooped down, rubbed his hand over the level surface of the stone. It was masonry.

All was silent about him; not even a dragon-fly disturbed the calm surface of the circular pool. No insect droned its fervid note in the clear, warm air.

Very quietly now, for he felt that the silence of this place must not be disturbed by any unnecessary sound, he started around the lake's circular rim. In twenty steps he had reached the source of the stream. Here the edge of masonry was cut into a U through which the water flowed silently out. He resumed his walk, and the circuit occupied fifteen minutes. He reached his starting-point, sat down on the warm rock-edge, and looked intently into the pool. It must be fed by deep, subterranean springs, he judged, and these springs, possibly, ebbed and flowed, a rhythm reflected in a rise and fall of the pool's surface; a consequent rise and fall in the water of the stream.

The sun was almost intolerably hot. He walked off to the nearest mahogany grove, pitched his camp in its deep shade, and sat down to wait till noon. Here he prepared lunch, ate it, and returned to the basin's rim.

The reservoir was several feet lower, the water now barely trickling through its outlet. He watched the waters sink, fascinated. He leaned over the edge of masonry and gazed into their still depths. A cloud passed over the sun, throwing the great pool into shade.

No bottom was visible. Down, down, his gaze traveled, and as he looked the rate of the sinking water-level increased and there arose from the pool a dim, hollow sound as some incalculable suction drew the waters down into the cylinder's depths.

An almost irresistible desire came over him to descend with the water. His scrutiny traveled about the inner surface of the great cylinder now revealed by the sinking waters.

What was that? Something, a vertical line, toward the other side, broke the cementlike smoothness of the chiseled surface. He started toward the point, his heart jumping as what he had vaguely suspected, hoped, became an actuality before his eyes. The vertical line was a ladder down the inner surface of the cylinder, of broad, copper-colored, metal insets extending far down until he lost it in the unfathomable darkness below.

The ladder's topmost inset step was some three feet below the top. Looking closely from the rim above it, he observed semicircular ridges on the rim itself, handholds, obviously, shaped like the handles of a stone crock, cut deeply into the masonry. A thin, metal handrail of the same material as the steps ran down straight and true beside them.

The impulse to descend became overpowering. He muttered a brief, fragmentary prayer, and stooped down, clutching the stone handholds. He stepped over the rim and down inside, and felt for the topmost step of the ladder with his foot. The step, and the railing, as he closed a firm right hand about it, felt slippery. But steps and rail were rigid, firmly set as though installed the day before. The metal showed no corrosion.

With a deep breath, he took one last look at the tops of the mahogany trees and began to go down the ladder.

At first he felt carefully for each succeeding step, clutched the unyielding handrail grimly, as the dank coolness of the stone cylinder closed in around him. Then, with custom, his first nervous vigilance relaxed. The steps were at precisely regular intervals; the handrail firm. He descended beyond the penetrating light of the first fifty feet into a region of increasing coolness and dimness.

When he reached the two hundredth step, he paused, resting, and looked down. Only a vague, imponderable dimness, a suggestion of infinite depth, was revealed to him. He turned his head about and looked up. A clear blue, exact circle stood out. Within it he saw the stars.

He descended another hundred steps, and now all was black about him. The blue circle above had turned darker. The stars glowed brilliantly.

He felt no fear. He had steady

nerves, fortitude, a fatalistic faith in something he named his destiny. If harm were to come to him, it would come, here or anywhere else. He reasoned that the water would not rise for many hours. In that blackness he resumed his descent. He went down and down, step after interminable step. . . .

It was wholly dark now. The circle above was only the size of a small coin, the stars indistinguishable; only their flickering brightness over the surface of the tiny disk.

He had counted 1,326 steps when something happened to his left foot. He could not lower it from the step on which it rested. The very edge of a shadow of cold fear fell upon him, but resolutely he put it away. He lowered his right foot to the same step, and, resting his body's weight on the left foot attempted to lower the right. He could not!

Then it dawned upon him that he had reached the bottom of the ladder. Holding firmly to the rail with his left hand he reached for his flashlight with the other. By its light he looked about him. His feet were on a metal platform some twelve feet square. Just to his left, leading into the wall of the cylinder, was the outline of a lancet-shaped doorway. A great ring hung on a hinged knob near his hand.

He stepped out upon the platform, his muscles feeling strange after the long and unaccustomed strain of the descent. He took hold of the door-ring, twisted it to the left. It turned in his hand. He pulled, and a beam of light, soft and mellow, came through the vertical crack. He pulled the door half-open, and the soft light flooded the platform. He stepped over to its edge and looked down, leaning on the metal handrail which ran about the edge. Blackness there—sheer, utter blackness!

He turned again to the door. He had not come thus far to yield to misgivings as to what might lie behind it. He slipped through the opening and pulled the door to behind him. It shut, true and exactly flush with its surrounding walls and jambs, solidly.

He stood in a small, square room, of the same smooth masonry as the cylinder, floored with sheets of the coppery metal. The light came through from another doorway, open opposite the side where he stood. Resolutely he crossed the small room and looked through the door.

Vast space—a cathedral—was the first, breath-taking impression. Far above, a vast, vaulted arch of masonry. In the dim distance towered an amazing figure, so incredible that Grosvenor let out his breath in a long sigh and sat down weakly on the smooth floor.

The figure was that of an enormous goat, reared on a pair of colossal legs, the lowered head with sweeping horns pointing forward, some eighty feet in the air. About this astounding image hung such an air of menacing savagery that Grosvenor, weary with his long descent, covered his face with his hands to shut it out. He was aroused out of his momentary let-down by a sound.

He sat up, listened. It was a kind of faint, distant chanting. Suppressing a shudder he looked again toward the overpowering majesty of the colossus. A great concourse of people, dwarfed by the distance, danced rhythmically before the gigantic idol. The chant rose higher in measured cadence. Fascinated, Grosvenor rose and walked toward the distant dancers.

When he had traversed half the space between, the image took on a dignity not apparent from the greater distance. The craggy, bestial face was now benevolent, as it looked down upon its devotees. There was a grotesque air of benediction about the flare of the forehoofs as they seemed to wave in grave encouragement to the worshipers beneath. The atten-

tion of the throng was so occupied with their dance that Grosvenor remained unobserved. Clouds of incense rose before the image, making the head appear to nod, the forelegs to wave gravely.

Something more than its cadence seemed now to mingle with the chanting. There was something oddly familiar about it, and Grosvenor knitted his brows in the effort to place it. Then it came to him all at once. It was the words of the ancient Greek Chorus. Nearer and nearer he approached, his feet making no sound on the dull, russet-colored, metal flooring. It was like walking on solid lead. He stooped, at this thought, and with his sheath-knife scratched its surface, dulled with the wear of countless feet. A thin, wirelike splinter curled behind his scratching knife-point. It was bright yellow on the fresh surface. He tore the splinter loose, held it close. It was soft, like lead—virgin gold.

He placed the sliver in his jacket pocket and stood, dumfounded, his heart pounding tumultuously. Gold! . . .

The chanting ceased. A clear, woman's voice detached itself; was lifted in a pæan—a hymn of praise. The words now came to him clear and full. He stopped dead, trying, straining all his faculties, to understand. The woman was singing in classical Greek!

Something of modern Greek he understood from a long professional sojourn in the Mediterranean island of Xante where once he had been employed by the owner of a group of currant-plantations, and where he had learned enough of the Italianized Greek of the island to make himself understood. He hastened forward, stopping quite near the rearmost worshipers. This was no dialect. This was Old Greek, Attic Greek, the tongue of Hellas, of classic days, as used to celebrate the Mysteries about the altars of Zeus and the Nature gods; in the Sacred Groves; at Elis, and Dodona, and before the shrines of Apollo—and in the worship of Pan. Pan!—the Goat. The beginnings of an understanding surged through his mind.

In the ancient tongue of Homer and Æschylus, this recitative now began to take form in his mind. It was, he soon perceived, a hymn to Pan, to the patron god of woodlands and wild places; of glades and streams and hidden groves; of nymphs and dryads. . . .

The people swayed to the cadences of the hymn, and at intervals the vast throng breathed out a few rhythmical words, a hushed, muted chorus, in which were recited the Attributes of Pan. . . .

Grosvenor found himself swaying with them, the notes of the chorus somehow strangely familiar to him, as though remembered after a great interval, although he *knew* that he had never before in this life heard anything like this. He approached nearer, without concealment now, mingled with the multitude pouring out its corporate soul to the god of Nature.

The hymn ended. Then, to a thin, piping note—the note of a syrinx—and with no confusion, a dance began. Grosvenor danced naturally with a group of four, and the others, in a kind of gentle ecstasy, danced with him, a dance as old as trees and hills, the worship of the Great Powers which through the dignity and grace of the dance seemed to promise strange and unknown joys. . . .

The dance ended, abruptly, on a note of the pan-pipes. Grosvenor, brought to himself, glanced quickly about him. He was conspicuous. The others were uniformly dressed in blue kirtles, sandals on their graceful feet. The people were very beautiful. Grace and dignity marked their every movement.

Behind the colossal image of the Goat a great recess was set off by an arch which towered aloft out of sight. Here stood an altar, about whose

upper edge ran cameolike figures: youths and girls bearing wreaths; garlanded oxen; children with torches; and, centrally placed, the grotesque figure of Pan with his goat's legs and small, crooked horns upon his forehead—Pan seated, his pipes at his lips.

Suddenly every eye turned to the altar.

There came from a recess a woman, tall and graceful, bearing in her hands a slender vase of white stone. From this, on reaching the altar, she poured out upon it a thin stream of golden-colored oil. An intense, reddish flame arose at once. The vast audience stood motionless.

Then a note on the pipe, and from the throng, quite close to Grosvenor, a young man stepped, and mounted broad, shallow steps to the altar. In his hand he carried a live beetle, held delicately by the edges of elevated wings. Straight to the altar he proceeded and dropped the insect in the center of the flame. So silent was the motionless throng that the crackle of the flame devouring this inconsiderable offering was plainly heard. Bowing to the priestess, the young man returned to his place.

A sigh, such as proceeds from a large concourse of people who have been keeping silence, now arose from the throng, which forthwith broke up into conversing groups.

Then the first intimation of fear fell upon Grosvenor like a black mantle. For the first time since his arrival among this incredible company, a quarter of a mile underneath the surface of an "uninhabited" West Indian island, he took sudden thought for his safety. It was late in the day to think of that! He was surrounded by these people, had intruded into their worship, a worship ancient when the Classics were composed. He was effectually cut off from any chance of escape, should they prove hostile. He saw a thickening group closing in about him—curious, incredulous, utterly taken by surprize at discovering this stranger in their midst. . . .

By a great effort, and in a voice hardly more than a whisper—for his danger had made itself overwhelmingly apparent to him—he spoke in his best attempt at pure Greek:

"I give you greeting, in the name of Pan!" he said.

"And to you, greeting, O barbarian," replied a deep and rich voice behind him.

The throng about him stirred—a movement of deference. He turned. The graceful priestess stood close to him. He bowed, prompted by an instinct for "good manners."

The priestess made a graceful inclination before him. Instinct prompted him a second time. He addressed her:

"I come to you in love and peace." It was a phrase he had gathered from the hymn to Pan—that phrase "love and peace." He continued:

"I have sojourned in the Land of Hellas, the home of the great Pan, though no Hellene, as my speech declares."

"Sojourn here, then, with Pan's people in love and peace," returned the priestess with commanding dignity. She made him a summoning gesture.

"Come," she said, and, turning, led the way back toward the altar.

He followed, into the blackening gloom of the sanctuary, and straight before him walked his conductress without so much as a glance right or left. They passed at last between two enormous curtains screening an aperture, and Grosvenor found himself in a very beautiful room, square, and unmistakably Greek in its appointments. Two long couches stood at each side, along the walls. In the center a chaste, rectangular table held a great vase of the yellow metal, heaped with pomegranates.

The priestess, pausing, motioned him gracefully to one of the seats, and reclined opposite him upon the other.

She clapped her hands, and a beautiful child ran into the room. After a round-eyed glance at the stranger, he stood before the priestess, who spoke rapidly to him. He left the room, and almost immediately returned with a vase and two small goblets of the ruddy gold. The drink proved to be pomegranate-juice mingled with cold water. Grosvenor found it very refreshing.

When they had drunk, the priestess began at once to speak to him.

"From where do you come, O barbarian?"

"From a region of cold climate, in the north, on the mainland."

"You are not, then, of Hispaniola?"

"No. My countrymen are named 'Americans.' In my childhood my countrymen made war upon those of Hispaniola, driving them from a great island toward the lowering sun from this place, and which men name 'Cuba.'"

The priestess appeared impressed. She continued her questioning:

"Why are you here among the People of Pan?"

Grosvenor explained his mission to the island of Saona, and, as well as his limited knowledge of Greek permitted, recounted the course of his adventure to the present time. When he had finished:

"I understand you well," said the priestess. "Within man's memory none have been, save us of the People of Pan, upon this island's surface. I understand you are the forerunner of others, those who come to take of the wood of the surface. Are all your fellow-countrymen worshipers of Pan?"

Grosvenor was stuck! But his sense of humor came to his rescue and made an answer possible.

"We have a growing 'cultus' of Pan and his worship," he answered gravely. "Much in our life comes from the same source as yours, and in spirit many of us follow Pan. This following grows fast. The words for it in our tongue are 'nature-study,' 'camping,' 'scouting,' 'golf,' and there are many other varieties of the cult of Pan."

The priestess nodded.

"Again, I understand," she vouchsafed. She leaned her beautiful head upon her hand and thought deeply.

It was Grosvenor who broke a long silence. "Am I permitted to make enquiries of you?" he asked.

"Ask!" commanded the priestess.

Grosvenor enquired about the rise and fall of the water in the great cylinder; the origin of the cylinder itself: was the metal of which the floors and steps and handrail were made common? Where did the People of Pan get the air they breathed? How long had they been here, a quarter of a mile beneath the earth's surface? On what kind of food did they live? How could fruit—he indicated the pomegranates—grow here in the bowels of the earth?

He stopped for sheer lack of breath. Again the priestess smiled, though gravely.

"Your questions are those of a man of knowledge, although you are an outlander. We are Hellenes and here we have lived always. All of us and our fathers and fathers' fathers were born here. But our tradition teaches us that in the years behind the years, in the very ancient past, in an era so remote that the earth's waters were in a different relation to the land, a frightful cataclysm overwhelmed our mother-continent, Antillea. That whole land sank into the sea, save only one Deucalion and his woman, one Pyrrha, and these from Atlantis, the sister continent in the North. These, so the legend relates, floated upon the waters in a vessel prepared for them with much food and drink, and these hav-

ing reached the Great Land, their seed became the Hellenes.

"Our forebears dwelt in a colony of our mother continent, which men name Yucatan, a peninsula. There came upon our forebears men of warlike habit, men fierce and cruel, from a land adjacent to Hellas, named 'Hispaniola'. These interlopers drove out our people who had for eons followed the paths of love and peace; of flocks and herds; of song and the dance, and the love of fields and forest and grove, and the worship of Pan. Some of our people they slew and some they enslaved, and these destroyed themselves.

"But among our forebears, during this persecution, was a wise man, one Anaxagoras, and with him fled a colony to the great island in the South which lies near this island. There they settled and there would have carried on our worship and our ways of peace. But here they of Hispaniola likewise came, and would not permit our people to abide in peace and love.

"Then were our people indeed desperate. By night they fled on rafts, and reached this low-lying place. Here they discovered the cylinder, and certain ones, greatly daring, cast themselves on the mercy of Pan and descended while the waters were sunken.

"Here, then, we have dwelt since that time, in peace and love.

"We know not why the waters fall and rise, but our philosophers tell us of great reservoirs far beneath the platform where man's foot has not stepped. In these, as the planet revolves, there is oscillation, and thus the waters flow and ebb once in the day and not twice as does the salt sea.

"We believe that in times past, beyond the power of man to measure or compute, the dwellers of these islands, which then were mountain-tops, ere the submersion of Antillea and its sister continent Atlantis, caused the waters of the sea to rise upon them, and whose descendants those of Hispaniola did name 'Carib' were men of skill and knowledge in mighty works, and that these men, like one Archimedes of the later Hellas, did plan to restore the earth's axis to its center, for this planet revolves not evenly but slantwise, as they who study the stars know well. We believe that it was those mighty men of learning and skill who built the cylinder.

"Vessels and the metal of the floor were here when we came, and this metal, being soft and of no difficulty in the craftsman's trade, we have used to replace the vessels as time destroys them and they wear thin. This metal, in vast quantities, surrounds our halls and vaults here below the surface of the land above.

"Our light is constant. It is of the gases which flow constantly from the bowels of the earth. Spouts confine it. Fire placed at the mouths of the spouts ignites it. The spouts, of this metal, are very ancient. Upon their mouths are coverings which are taken away when fire is set there; replaced when the light is needed no more in that place.

"Our air we receive from shaftways from the surface of the earth above. Their ground openings are among the white rocks. Our philosophers think the yellow metal was melted by the earth's fires and forced up through certain of the ancient air-openings from below."

The priestess finished her long recital, Grosvenor listening with all his faculties in order to understand her placid speech.

"I understand it all except the fruit," said he.

The priestess smiled again, gravely.

"The marvels of nature make no difficulty for your mind, but this simple question of fruit is difficult for you! Come—I will show you our gardens."

SHE rose; Grosvenor followed. They passed out through various chambers until they arrived at one whose

outer wall was only a balustrade of white stone. An extraordinary sight met Grosvenor's eyes.

On a level piece of ground of many acres grew innumerable fruits: pineapples, mango-trees, oranges, pomegranates. Here were row upon row of sapodilla trees, yam-vines, egg-plants, bananas, lemon and grapefruit trees; even trellises of pale green wine-grapes.

At irregular intervals stood metal pipes of varying thickness and height, and from the tops of these, even, whitish flares of burning gas illuminated the "gardens." A dozen questions rose in Grosvenor's mind. "How? Why?"

"What causes your failure to understand?" enquired the priestess, gently. "Heat, light, moisture, good earth well tended! Here, all these are present. These fruits are planted from long ago, and constantly renewed; originally they grew on the earth's surface."

They walked back through the rooms to the accompaniment of courteous inclinations from all whom they passed. They resumed their places in the first room. The priestess addressed Grosvenor:

"Many others will follow you; those who come to procure the wood of the forest above. Nothing we have is of any value to these people. Nothing they may bring do we desire. It would be well if they came and took their wood and departed knowing naught of us of the People of Pan here underground.

"We shall, therefore, make it impossible for them to descend should they desire so to do. We shall cut the topmost steps of the ladder away from the stone; replace them when your countrymen who drove the people of Hispaniola from Cuba have departed. I will ask you to swear by Pan that you will reveal nothing of what you have seen. Then remain with us if you so desire, and, when your countrymen have departed, come again in peace and love as behooveth a devotee of Pan."

"I will swear by Pan, as you desire," responded Grosvenor, his mind on the incalculable fortune in virgin gold which had here no value beyond that of its utility for vessels, and floors, and steps! Indeed he needed no oath to prevent his saying anything to his "countrymen!" He might be trusted for that without an oath! A sudden idea struck him.

"The sacrifice," said he,—"the *thuria*, or rather, I should say, the holokautósis—the burnt offering. Why was only an insect sacrificed to Pan?"

The priestess looked down at the burnished metal floor of the room and was silent. And as she spoke, Grosvenor saw tears standing in her eyes.

"The sinking and rise of the waters is not the only rhythm of this place. Four times each year the gases flow from within the earth. Then—every living thing upon this island's surface dies! At such seasons we here below are safe. Thus it happens that we have no beast worthy of an offering to Pan. Thus, at our festivals we may offer only inferior things. We eat no flesh. That is sacred to Pan, as it has been since our ancestors worshiped Him in the groves of Yucatan. That He may have His offering one or more of us journeys to the cylinder's top at full moon. Some form of life has always been found by diligent search. Somewhere some small creature survives. If we should not discover it, He would be angry, and, perhaps, slay us. We know not."

"When does the gas flow upward again?" enquired Grosvenor. He was thinking of Christian Fabio waiting for him there on the beach.

"At the turning of the season. It seethes upward in three days from now."

"Let me take my oath, then," replied Grosvenor, "and then depart

forthwith. Then I would speak concerning what I am to do with those others who follow me to this land."

The priestess clapped her hands, and the little serving-lad entered. To him she gave a brief order, and he took his departure. Then with the priestess Grosvenor made his arrangement about the wood-cutting force—a conversation which occupied perhaps a quarter of an hour. The little messenger returned as they were finishing. He bowed, spoke rapidly to the priestess, and retired.

"Rise, and follow me," she directed Grosvenor.

Before the great idol the people were again gathering when they arrived beside the altar. They stood, and the priestess held out her arms in a sweeping gesture, commanding silence. An imponderable quiet followed.

His hands beneath hers on the altar of Pan, Grosvenor took his oath as she dictated it to him:

"By the great Pan, I swear—by hill and stream, by mountain and valley, by the air of the sky and the water of streams and ponds, by the sea and by fire which consumes all things—by these I swear to hold inviolate within me that which I have known here in this temple and among the People of Pan. And may He pursue me with His vengeance if I break this my oath, in this world and in the world to come, until water ceaseth to flow, earth to support the trees, air to be breathed, and fire to burn—by these and by the Horns and Hooves of Pan I swear, and I will not break my oath."

Then, conducted by the priestess, Grosvenor walked through the people, who made a path for them, across the great expanse of the temple to the small anteroom beside the cylinder. Here the priestess placed her hands upon Grosvenor's head. "I bless thee, in Pan's name," she said, simply. He opened the door, passed through onto the metal platform, and pushed it shut behind him. . . .

HE FOUND the ascent very wearing and his muscles ached severely before he could discern clearly the stars flaming in the disk above his head. At last he grasped the stone handles on the rim. Wearily he drew himself above ground, and stretched himself upon the level rim of the cylinder.

Before starting down the gentle slope for his camp under the shade of the mahogany forest's abundant leafage, he paused beside one of the white rocks, laboriously heaving it to one side. Beneath it was an aperture, running straight down, and lined with a curiously smooth, lavalike stone. He had seen one of the air-pipes which the priestess had described. He knew now that he had not been passing through some incredibly strange dream. He stepped away and was soon within the forest's grateful shade.

He reached camp and Christian Fabio a little before 7:30 that evening, finding supper ready and the faithful Christian agog for news. This he proffered in Christian's kind of language, ending by the statement that the stream "originated in a lake of indubitably prehistoric volcanic origin possessing superficial undulatory siphonage germane to seismic disturbance."

Christian, pop-eyed at this unexpected exhibition of learning on his master's part, remarked only: "How very extraordinary!" and thereafter maintained an awed silence.

The next day Grosvenor signaled the *Madeleine*, on her return trip, and taking Christian with him, returned to San Juan "for certain necessary supplies which had been overlooked."

From there he sent the company a long letter in which he enlarged on the danger of the periodic gas-escape and gave a favorable report on the island's forestation. He discharged Christian with a recommendation and

a liberal bonus. Then he returned to Saona alone and completed his month's survey, doing his own cooking, and sleeping with no attention to non-existent insects. He did not visit the island's center again. He wished to expedite the woodcutting in every possible way, and disliked the loss of even a day.

The survey completed — in three weeks—he went back to San Juan, cabled his full report, and was at once instructed to assemble his gang and begin.

Within another month, despite the wails of *"mañana"* — tomorrow — a village, with himself as lawmaker, guide, philosopher, friend, and boss, was established on Saona. Cooks, camp roustabouts, wood-cutters, and the paraphernalia of an American enterprise established themselves as though by magic, and the cutting began. Only trees in excess of a certain girth were to be taken down.

By almost superhuman efforts on Grosvenor's part, the entire job was finished well within the three-month period. Three days before the exact date when the gas was to be expected, every trace of the village except the space it had occupied was gone, and not a person was left on Saona's surface. The great collection of mahogany he had made he took, beginning a week later, by tugboat to San Juan, whence it was reshipped to New York and Boston, to Steinway, and Bristol and other boat-building centers; to Ohio to veneering plants; to Michigan to the enormous shops of the Greene and Postlewaithe Furniture Company.

Grosvenor's job was finished.

In response to his application to the company, he was granted a month's well-earned vacation, accompanied by a substantial bonus for his good work.

This time he did not travel by the *Madeleine* to Saona. Instead he took ship for Port-au-Prince, Haiti, thence by another vessel to Santo Domingo City; from that point, in a small, coastwise vessel, to San Pedro Macoris.

From Macoris, where he had quietly hired a small sailboat, he slipped away one moonless evening, alone. Thirty hours afterward, he reached Saona, and, making his boat fast in a small, landlocked inlet which he had discovered in the course of his surveys, and with a food-supply for two days, he walked along the beach half a mile to the mouth of the stream.

He followed the well-remembered path until he came to the edge of the woods. He had not brought his gang as far as this. There had been more than enough mahogany boles to satisfy the company without passing inland farther than the level ground.

He walked now, slowly, under the pouring sunlight of morning, across the broken ground to the cylinder's edge, and there, temporarily encamped, he waited until it began to sink. He watched it until it had gone down a dozen feet or more, and then walked around to the point where the ladder began.

The ladder was gone. Not so much as a mark in the smooth masonry indicated that there ever had been a ladder. Once more, with a sinking heart, he asked himself if his strange adventure had been a dream—a touch of sun, perhaps. . . .

This was, dreams and sunstrokes apart, simply inexplicable. Twice, during the course of the wood-cutting operations, the People of Pan had communicated with him, at a spot agreed upon between him and the priestess. Both times had been early in the operations. It was nearly three months since he had seen any concrete evidence of the People's existence. But, according to their agreement, the ladder-steps should have been replaced immediately after the last of his gang had left Saona. This, plainly, had not been done. Had the People of Pan, underground there,

played him false? He could not bring himself to believe that; yet — there was no ladder; no possible means of communicating with them. He was as effectually cut off from them as though they had been moon-dwellers.

Grosvenor's last man had left the island three days before the season's change — September twenty-first. It was now late in October.

Ingress and egress, as he knew, had been maintained by a clever, simple arrangement. Just below ground-level a small hole had been bored through the rim, near the U-shaped opening. Through this a thin, tough cord had run to a strong, thin, climbing-rope long enough to reach the topmost step remaining. He remembered this. Perhaps the people below had left this arrangement.

HE FOUND the hole, pulled lightly on the string. The climbing-rope came to light. An ingenious system of a counter-pull string allowed the replacing of the climbing-rope. Obviously the last person above ground from below had returned successfully, leaving everything shipshape here. To get down he would have to descend some thirty feet on this spindling rope to the topmost step. He tested the rope carefully. It was in good condition. There was no help for it. He must start down that way.

Very carefully he lowered himself hand over hand, his feet against the slippery inner surface of the stone cylinder. It was a ticklish job, but his fortitude sustained him. He found the step, and, holding the climbing-rope firmly, descended two more steps and groped for the handrail. He got it in his grasp, pulled the return-string until it was taut, then began the tedious descent, through its remembered stages of gradual darkening, the damp pressure of terrible depth upon the senses, the periodic glances at the lessening disk above, the strange glow of the stars. . . .

At last he reached the platform, groped for the door-ring, drew open the door.

In the anteroom a terrible sense of foreboding shook him. The condition of the ladder might not be a misunderstanding. Something unforeseen, fearful, might have happened!

He pulled himself together, crossed the anteroom, looked in upon the vast temple.

A sense of physical emptiness bore down upon him. The illumination was as usual—that much was reassuring. Across the expanse the great idol reared its menacing bulk, the horned head menacingly lowered.

But before it bowed and swayed no thronged mass of worshipers. The temple was empty and silent.

Shaken, trembling, the sense of foreboding still weighing heavily upon him, he started toward the distant altar.

Soon his usual vigorous optimism came back to him. These had been unworthy fears! He looked about him as he proceeded, at the dun sidewalls rising, tier upon tier of vague masonry, up to the dim vault in the darkness above. Then the sense of evil sprang out again, and struck at his heart. His mouth went dry. He hastened his pace. He began to run.

As he approached the altar, something strange, something *different*, appeared before him. The line formed by the elevation of the chancel as it rose from the flooring, stone against dull, yellowish metal, a thousand paces ahead, should have been sharp and clear. Instead, it was blurred, uneven.

As he came nearer he saw that the statue's prancing legs were heaped about with piled stuff. . . .

He ran on, waveringly, uncertain now. He did not want to see clearly what he suspected. He stumbled over something bulky. He stopped, turned to see what had lain in his way.

It was the body of a man, mummified—dry, leathery, brown; the blue

(Continued on page 426)

The CITY of IRON CUBES

by H.F.Arnold

"Without a sound she threw up her arms and collapsed on the floor."

THROUGHOUT the journey from Lima he had ridden ahead of me over the desert and across the mountain in that same silent slouching fashion. It was not that he was deaf, because on occasions at night and morning I had overheard him whining plaintive melodies to his horse. But his lack of conversation was getting upon my nerves.

For that matter the country through which we were passing was in itself enough to discomfort one. For ten days the Peruvian desert had been a continual, never-ending stretch of cream-colored sand, dirtied here and there by a clump of sparsely creeping brush. Nights had found us always at the same-appearing group of tiny trees with a muddy waterhole in the center from which they drew their life.

At last we had reached the mountains and for another ten days had wound our way in and out, through narrow passes and over treacherous summits. We traveled always easterly into the very heart of the Andes.

It was extraordinary foolishness that was driving me on. Dr. Frelinghusen was an old friend both to me and my father, but unless I had thought him in dire need I would never have answered his message in person. I carried it with me in my pocket. There were only seven words:

COME TO ME, DANA. I NEED YOU.

Just that, on a yellow cablegram blank, yet I had traveled half around the world to answer it. Frelinghusen had a way with him which made even his colleagues of the Royal Society eager to be of service. His reputation as the leading seismologist of his time was in itself sufficient to command attention, and ordinarily to secure obedience to his wishes.

So I, Dana Harrod, age thirty-seven, ex-captain in His Majesty's engineers, had dropped the labor of a lifetime to travel to the world's end to satisfy the whim of an old man. In Lima I had met the vaquero who in dumb show had offered me one of Frelinghusen's cards on which was scrawled:

Get provisions for three weeks and follow the bearer.

It was now nearing dusk of the twentieth day, and we must be approaching our destination. The vaquero rode on ahead as usual, but at last he appeared to be shedding his customary preoccupation. Instead of riding with his head sunk between his shoulders he was eyeing the country around us. Now to right and to left, his sharp black eyes searched the landscape anxiously. His expression, interpreted in actions known the world over, had only one meaning—anxiety and growing fear.

During the last hour we had been ascending rapidly and the heavy tropical vegetation was thinning out as we reached an elevation of more than a mile. We were moving up the slope of a huge mountain whose sides were very steep. The summit was peculiar in formation, differing from the peaks around it in that its crest had, when seen from a distance, the appearance of having been snapped off as cleanly as though cut by a giant knife. What was left constituted a plateau which, when I had viewed it from the top of the pass the day before, I judged to be about two miles across.

A half-hour above the horizon, the sun hung as a pulsating living ball of molten flame. Around it, for the first time, as I remembered, were wraiths of mist which thickened as I watched.

The vaquero stopped his horse to rise in his stirrups and peer ahead of him. I noticed then that we had nearly reached the crest. Suddenly he whirled his horse and darted toward me. Dust clouds kicked up

by the mare's flying heels twisted themselves into fantastic shapes.

In an instant he was past. Alarmed, I turned in my saddle to look after him. With the flat of his hand he was motioning me to continue up the path. Seeing that I had caught his signal, he raised his arm above his head and gave vent to a single shrill yell. Then he rounded a curve and vanished from sight. For a time I heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs as the beast raced down the mountain: then all was silent as before.

There were but slight chances of overtaking him, so I once more turned my horse and continued up the grade. Night was coming on swiftly and I visioned spending it alone without fire or water. Musing on the strange behavior of my guide, I rode for perhaps ten minutes in silence while the sun sank lower and lower. Then, as I reached the crest, I saw a sight so unusual that I uttered an exclamation of surprize.

Half concealed by wisps of cloud floating over the plateau and directly in front of me was an immense, reddish-black rock, partly buried in the sand. It must have protruded from the soil at least three hundred feet. The rock was splotched here and there with rust-colored corrosions which, even at that distance, to my experienced eye denoted that the material in the composition could be nothing else but iron.

However, the first peculiarity of the rock which had impressed me was its shape rather than its composition. Its dimensions, allowing for the amount sunk in the sands, were those of a perfect cube.

As I drew nearer I saw that my first impression had been correct. Save where the edges had been slightly blunted, the immense column was as perfectly formed as the huge stone blocks of the pyramids. I reined my tired horse to the nearest side and tapped lightly on the surface with the butt of my revolver. I had not been mistaken. The block was of iron, but of an alloy that I had never seen before.

Then, by the last strong rays of the sun, I saw through the mist another cube, and then another. Three, four, five—God, there was a regular city of them! The sun sank below the horizon and cut off the view. From the darkness came a faint, ringing cry:

"Hello! Hello!"

I recognized the voice. It was that of my old teacher and friend. With a shout I spurred my horse through the dusk and a minute later we were shaking hands.

"My boy, my boy, to think that you have really come!"

Overcome by emotion, he pumped my arm enthusiastically and stared into my eyes, too proud to hide the flowing tears in his own.

After a few minutes we calmed sufficiently for me to take notice of my surroundings again.

"Doctor, however did you do it? And why?" I gestured at the immense piles of iron hidden now under their blanket of darkness. He chuckled in answer.

"I didn't, my boy, but I'd give my life to know who did and why they did it. But come, the answer can wait. It has been waiting now for a good many years." And he led the way through the night.

A FEW hundred yards found us at his hut, half hidden under the shadow of one of the immense cubes. My weary horse was too exhausted to wander far, so I turned him loose to find his way to food and water. Then I entered the lighted interior, where keen odors announced that Dr. Frelinghusen had preceded me for cause.

Putting aside my eager inquiries, he forced me to the table, where a meal was waiting. It was indeed welcome, for the mountain air at that elevation induced a keen appe-

tite. A half-hour later, having done full duty to the repast, I pushed back my chair and refused to allow my questioning to be delayed any longer.

Dr. Frelinghusen piled fresh wood on the fire and lighted his pipe before he would oblige me. In the firelight his three-score years appeared to weigh upon him and I saw that he was much thinner and more careworn than when I had seen him last. His straight shoulders were now heavily bowed and, never a tall man, he now seemed to have shrunk to much less than his former size. Only his eyes were unchanged, and they were as black and startling as ever before. Peering out from under the bushy white eyebrows, they nearly struck one dumb with the intensity of their suppressed excitement.

"Dana," he said, "I have something to show you." And he pushed back his chair to go over to a cupboard in one corner and return with a fragment of metal in his hand.

"Here it is," he said. "What do you make of it?"

I turned the piece over in my hand and examined it carefully before replying. It was obviously a fragment chipped from one of the monsters surrounding us. I told him as much.

"You are right," he acknowledged, "but what else do you notice about it?"

I examined the fragment again.

"Why," I said, "the metal is nearly pure and has been very nearly fused. I should say that it has, at one time or another, been subjected to intense heat."

The doctor smiled in satisfaction.

"You are right again. I am glad to see that you have not lost your keenness. Aside from the fact that the piece is obviously of refined iron ore, your analysis covers the field entirely."

"That goes without saying," I returned. "But why? What is the meaning of it all? Why those iron monsters circled on the plateau plain around us, and who or what placed them there?"

"I wish I knew," he said. "I have a suspicion, but it is hardly enough even to guess at. However, I will tell you what I think." He settled himself more comfortably in his chair and drew a long puff from his pipe. "It's so good to have someone to talk to," he said. "My boy, you are the first white man I've seen in nearly three years."

I gestured impatiently.

"Oh, the guess is coming," he said; "I won't keep it back any longer. As you know, my specialty for many years has been earthquakes and their causes. I flatter myself that I know as much about them as any person living, which"—and he grimaced—"I must admit isn't much.

"Some twenty years ago I became interested in this section of Peru, where earthquakes are so common that the natives never even mention them. One fact about the Peruvian quakes especially fascinated me. It was that periodically, every four years, there was one sharp shock which could not be accounted for by any methods I have ever used or heard of.

"These periodical shocks were followed by no settling tremors; that is to say, there were no after-shocks. Just one distinct temblor and there were no more of that particular variety of earthquake for another four years. The temblors, as I found after sixteen years of study, could be forecast to the very minute. It was most peculiar.

"Another feature was that the tremors were accompanied by disturbances in the sky. This was not highly unusual, because the sky was aflame when the great quake shook Peru on August 13, 1868. Conventionalists wrote that this fiery appearance was a reflection from a Peruvian volcano, but the subject

was investigated by M. Gay, according to whom—see *Comptes Rendus*, 69, 262—there had been no volcanic activity in Peru at the time.

"We have many similar instances of earth tremors accompanied by sky disturbances. One of them occurred in Madrid on February 10, 1896, when the wall of a building occupied by the American embassy was thrown down. Stones fell from the sky, and for five hours and a half a cloud of meteoric debris hung over the city. See the *Scientific American*, 74, 179.

"So you see, aerial disturbances and earthquakes are rather often related. But suppose the aerial disturbance and the earthquake occur at periodic intervals? What then? And suppose this periodic combination of earthquake and sky disturbance occurs always at the same spot on the earth's surface? Such a repetition would disrupt the beliefs and statements of science because it would indicate only one of two possible conclusions—either that the earth was stationary or that some power was directing the meteorites so that they would land at some particular spot on the earth's surface at a defined time.

"I had even a previous occurrence somewhat like the one I had supposed, to work with.

"On June 12, 1858, as reported in the Birmingham, England, *Daily Post* of June 14, hundreds of thousands of tiny black aerolites poured from the sky upon the streets of Birmingham. In June, 1860, tremendous numbers of similar stones fell from the sky at Wolverhampton, a town thirteen miles from Birmingham. (*La Science Pour Tous*, June 19, 1860.) In the *Field*, September 8, 1860, a correspondent wrote that on the 13th of August, after a thunderstorm, the streets of Birmingham were found to have been covered with little stones which were thought to have fallen from the sky. On May 29, 1868, enormous numbers of little black stones were seen to fall from the sky at Birmingham (Birmingham *Daily Post*, May 30, 1868). After a severe storm similar stones fell at Wolverhampton on May 25, 1869. (*Symons' Meteorological Magazine*, 4, 137.)

"This is but one recorded instance of several such series of phenomena," said the doctor. "What does it indicate to you?"

I stared at him in astonishment. "I can think of no other conclusions than the ones you have drawn," I told him.

"That was the way I reasoned it, anyway," replied Dr. Frelinghusen, "and that is why I wanted, more than I have ever wanted anything else in my life, to investigate these tremors and disturbances in Peru. I could draw but two conclusions: either the earth was stationary and all scientists were fools, or else"—and he stopped to relight his pipe—"or else the disturbances were caused by some unknown power operating periodically.

"That was my belief when I landed in Peru three and a half years ago, and I have found no reason to alter it since. As my ship entered the harbor, port officials told me that my last forecast had been correct and that there had been another single and unaccountable shock on the night of July 25, 1921. It gave me new confidence.

"For six months I searched the unexplored regions of Peru for fragments of meteors. Then I stumbled upon this plateau and have, except for one short period, stayed here ever since. These cubes were all of them here when I arrived.

I was beginning to understand. "Doctor," I gasped, "you mean that——?"

He nodded. "I mean that these seven cubes of iron that I found on this plateau are the meteors which, during the past twenty-eight years, have periodically, at four-year inter-

vals, landed on the earth at this latitude and longitude, here in Peru."

THE news, which unconsciously I had been expecting, nevertheless appalled me. After a moment, I rallied.

"And have you decided, Doctor? You have devoted more than three years to studying them. Are they natural? Is the earth a stationary body? Or else——?" But the seemingly inevitable alternative struck me dumb.

He ended my question. "Or else have they been directed by some unknown and possibly malignant force, you would ask?" He rose from his chair and paced the floor. "My boy," he said finally, "I do not understand how anything else could be true. I believe that for the past twenty-eight years and possibly longer, some conscious force or forces has propelled a series of bodies—projectiles if you like—at this earth and that seven of them have come safely to rest upon this plateau."

My courage had come back. "And the reason?"

"Is obvious. Each time a cube arrived, the earth shock has been perceptibly lighter. That is, the cube has landed more easily. The last temblor was scarcely noticeable in Lima."

"And that means?"

"That the time will come when—sooner or later—the cubes will land easily enough so that they might contain an occupant or occupants who would survive the shock."

"Men?"

The doctor paused in his stride to look me squarely in the eyes. "Not necessarily," he replied. "I don't know."

My nervousness would not allow me to sit quietly any longer. I sprang to my feet and hurried to the window. The air in the room seemed stifling.

"Dr. Frelinghusen," I asked, "when is the next cube due?"

The old man walked over and rested his hand on my shoulder. "Dana," he said, "you arrived barely in time. The shock of impact, by my calculations, is due at 10:45 tomorrow night."

At that instant, with the suddenness peculiar to tropical countries the moon appeared above the horizon, and with awe in my heart I gazed out over the plateau where, their black sides shining ominously, the seven gigantic cubes reflected the soft rays of the lunar body. Beside them, to complete a huge circle, I visioned an empty space where—how soon now?—would rest another visitor.

I turned and faced the doctor. "Are you sure that there is no mistake in your calculations?" I asked.

The question, which would have angered a more ignorant man, served only to amuse him. His pipe between his lips, he twiddled his thumbs and looked me in the eye.

"Dana," he asked, "did you ever know me to calculate anything four times and make an error?"

"Nevertheless," I persisted, "there is the possibility that——"

"I know," he interrupted, "and there is no possibility that should be overlooked. Come, we will check them over together."

And so, pencils in hand, we hunched over the rough wooden table in the center of the room and pored over the columns of figures. The calculations were tediously intricate and involved. They took many hours and all my skill to check and understand them. But at last, when dawn and the sun lightened our retreat, I was convinced. Barring some inconceivable error, a terrestrial visitor was due to arrive within the atmosphere of our planet within the next twenty-four hours. It was all true.

SOBERED and a trifle haggard from the night's work, I led the way out through the narrow, hand-hewn door to the outdoors and the sunshine. To

my eyes, accustomed to the soft rays of the kerosene lamp, everything for an interval appeared strained and unreal. Then I realized that the scene was very beautiful. The plateau, which sloped gently from the crest to form a gentle bowl, was a miniature paradise. A tiny stream trickled from a little spring behind the house to meander its way through a grassy meadow, uncaring or perhaps ignorant of the fact that it was to drop down 5,000 feet in a shower of rainbow-hued spray a few miles farther on. My horse, munching the grass beside the brook, lifted his head to neigh a welcome as we approached.

But in the fresh light of day, the seven blackened visitors from a port unknown appeared more massive, more grotesque than before. Indecent blocks of inanimate brutal metal, they desecrated our tiny paradise, suggesting, somehow, gaunt and weary warriors gazing lustfully at a countryside rich in goods and women and but poorly defended.

"The natives call this plateau *El Tahunjero,*" remarked my friend. "It is a native word meaning something similar to ghosts; that is, ghosts with infinite power and eternal malice. Nothing can persuade the natives to climb to the summit of this mountain. They believe it to be haunted—which is why, as you noticed, your vaquero left you on the trail.

"But come," he added in a brisker tone, "let us breakfast and then I will show you our visitors more closely."

We followed his suggestion, and an hour later, feeling somewhat refreshed, took up the work of examination. As the professor pointed out, each cube was sunk a trifle less deeply in the earth than was its predecessor which had arrived four years earlier. As the wind allowed no dust to accumulate on the plateau, it was only possible to reason that each new arrival had hit the earth more lightly than the one before.

Giving the first six cubes but a cursory examination, we moved on to the seventh and last, where my attention was attracted to a peculiar indentation on its surface.

"Come here, Doctor," I called. "What do you make of this?"

He hurried to my side and focused his spectacles against the wall.

"Why, it looks like a door," he said finally. "It is peculiar that I never noticed it before."

In the meantime I had moved closer so that I could examine the phenomenon. It was indeed a doorway fused fast into the solid metal, and of a size that was all of ten feet high by an equal width. In my interest I walked directly to the cube and rested my hand against the metal—only to leap back with an exclamation of pain.

The metal was nearly red-hot!

"It is not peculiar that you did not notice it," I said, "because in my opinion the outlines of this door were not before perceptible. They are being brought out by an internal heat."

"Dana," he cried, "what do you mean?"

"Come here and look," I told him. "The metal is getting hotter all the time."

Before our very eyes, the iron ore was being heated by some unknown force in the interior of the cube. In five minutes more, it turned a dull red. In twenty minutes the space occupied by the door was cherry pink. At that time we first became aware of a dull hissing sound similar to the roar of escaping steam when heard from a distance.

"Doctor," I shouted, "get back. Whatever is in your cube is coming out."

Hastily we retired to a safe distance, but barely in time; for, with a roar equal, it seemed, to twenty Niagaras, a huge jet of flame shot through an upper corner of the door's outline and for a distance of a hundred feet from the side of the mon-

ster. With the power of a demon and as effortless as a giant knife cutting through cheese, the flame traced the outlines of the archway, up one side, across the top and down on the other. Then, as we watched in breathless wonder, the flame knife cut through the bottom and the entire door fell outward with a deafening clang of heated metal.

Through the space left vacant we caught a momentary glimpse of a blazing interior as menacing as the dark mad mouth of hell. Then, as suddenly as though they had been snuffed by a giant forefinger, the flames went out.

"Most extraordinary," sniffled the doctor and reached forward for his spectacles, which in his excitement had fallen forward on the ground. "Whatever do you suppose is going to happen next?"

"I don't know," I responded, "but it would be my guess that if whatever is in there is alive and human, it is waiting for the metal to cool before attempting to come out.

"We may as well wait here as anywhere. Come, let us sit down."

Without waiting for his reply, I shoved him ahead of me to the shelter of the sixth cube, where, dripping wet with perspiration from our excitement and the heat of the tropic day, we seated ourselves to await whatever events might take place.

Then another idea occurred to me. "Doctor," I asked, "are you armed?"

"Why, no, Dana," he replied, "I never carry weapons. Do you think that we should?"

"I'm sure of it," I answered. "Wait here while I go back to the cabin and get our rifles."

Waiting only to receive his assent, I hurried back up the trail to the low thatched quarters where the doctor had lived for three years. I picked up two 30-30 repeating rifles and turned to retrace my steps. It was a clear, calm day, ideal for any outdoor purpose, but I realized that the night was coming. The night when — I raised my head to stare into the blue expanse of heavens above me.

Was it possible that somewhere thousands of miles away in the blue, a dark speck was speeding with the rapidity almost of light toward a rendezvous with our planet? The very idea was ridiculous—but then so were the cubes, and the doctor, and the events which we had just witnessed. To my fevered imagination it seemed that already I could distinguish a faint speck in the cloudless sky. Pshaw! It was only the heat waves rising from the ground.

I hurried down the trail toward the sixth cube, in the shadow of which I had left the doctor.

When I arrived at the spot where he had been seated, he was nowhere to be seen.

Thinking that perhaps I had mistaken the location, I looked in all directions and even walked all the way around the cube. There was no mistake. Although I had been absent scarcely ten minutes, the doctor had vanished as completely as though the skies had opened and—I stared across the valley toward the yawning entranceway with a shiver of apprehension. Could he have walked in without me? Or was it possible that something—some creature beyond my imagining—had come out from that dark hole and seized him in broad daylight?

It seemed impossible that he would willingly have entered without me. Cupping my hands to add force to my cry, I made the echoes answer and reanswer to my shout.

"Doctor! Dr. Frelinghusen!"

There was no response but echoes. Heat waves made the outlines of the seven rust-covered giants appear to wriggle and writhe as if to mock me. The plateau was as silent as death.

TAKING a moment to summon my courage, I then dropped one of the rifles to the ground and, making sure

that the other was loaded and cocked, I made my way across the open expanse of ground. Some undiscovered sixth sense told me that, willingly or unwillingly, the doctor had vanished into the seventh cube. At any rate, it was here that I would search first.

At the entranceway I paused again. Before me the interior was black—not black as a color is black but black with the total absence of all light. It was as if, within a few feet from the surface, an invisible curtain dropped between the interior and the outside world, cutting off even such penetrating particles as light rays. I snapped on an electric torch I had brought with me, and started in.

The interior smelt strongly of molten iron, and I could feel the heat of it penetrate through the soles of my shoes.

Ten feet from the door, my torch, which I had held in front of me, clicked suddenly and went out. I stopped, uncertain what course to pursue next. It was then that I became conscious of a faint tingling, somewhat in the nature of a slight electrical current, which was running up my outstretched arm.

There was no advantage in stopping now. Dropping my useless torch to the ground, I pushed ahead through the blackness. In a few feet, I found that the current had completely enveloped me. It was then I received a second surprize.

I had turned my head to catch my bearings from the light reflected in from the entrance. But there was no light. The door, although I had penetrated not more than a few yards, was invisible. It was startling. I felt trapped, shut in, like a wanderer enveloped in fog.

I turned back toward the outer air and had progressed but a few feet when, with equal suddenness, I found myself at the mouth of the tunnel with clear daylight shining ahead. At the same moment, the tingling sensation ceased.

I was puzzled at the change, and then realized that the current, force, or whatever it was, undoubtedly acted as a non-conductor of light rays. The inside of the cube was indeed a world shut off.

Adjusting the safety catch on my rifle, I once again entered the tunnel and passed the darkness-curtain in safety. I found myself ascending a narrow, iron-sided passageway which wound round and round as it led higher and higher. After a time, I realized that I was circling the rim of the cube and gradually climbing toward the top.

It was as if I were struggling upstream through a swiftly moving current of invisible water—a water that surged, boiled and bubbled around my knees, actuated by mysterious unseen forces. As I climbed, the force of the current increased, rising from my knees to my hips and from my hips to my chest. The situation was indescribably terrible. Alone in the blankness of an eternal night I fought against the insidious, invisible thing which sought to force me back.

Then, far ahead, I heard a faint cry, a cry that echoed and re-echoed through the metallic wall with the wail of a lost soul facing the gates of hell. Through unseen corridors the sound sought an outlet and, finding none, came back to me doubled and trebled. Then it broke and gasped and wailed, changing swiftly into a hideous strident laughter.

"Dana! Dana!" It was the voice again calling my own name, and I recognized the frightened tones of Dr. Frelinghusen. I had been right in surmising that his scientific zeal had caused him to enter the tunnel without me.

Fighting savagely against the binding, unreal cords that held me back, I hurried ahead, rounding curve after curve, scraping and tearing my flesh as I did so against the unpolished iron walls. The force around me relaxed

"At the same instant it struck."

its grip suddenly and I pitched headlong on my face.

I had passed through the current zone. Rising to my feet, I discovered by sense of touch that the walls and floor were no longer metallic but were formed of some hard, smooth substance, obviously a non-conductor. Ahead of me I heard the doctor's voice again:

"Dana! Dana!"

It sounded as if mixed with the fear was a note of mingled impatience and wonder.

My racing feet brought me smack against an abrupt wall and partly stunned me, so that it was almost a minute before I collected my faculties enough to notice that for the first time the passageway had turned sharply to the right. Then, most welcome of sights, I saw a blaze of light with the doctor's figure outlined sharply as he pressed his face against a transparent obstacle from the other side of which came the rays. He appeared to be uninjured.

Hearing my footsteps, he beckoned without turning his head. Subduing my feeling of gratitude that he was unharmed, I hastened to his side. He was gazing at a most amazing spectacle. The light came from an immense chamber on the other side of the glass. It was a compartment

nearly a hundred feet square, filling the heart of the cube. The room was so high that the ceiling was hidden in obscurity and the lamps which illuminated the floor were placed high in the open space above.

WITHOUT removing his gaze from the interior, the doctor reached out his hand and dragged me to him.

"Do you see her?" he demanded.

"See what?" I asked, and then as my eyes slowly became accustomed to the light I stared in breathless silence.

Face down upon a marble floor, within ten feet of the glass against which we crouched, was the body of a woman. Although I watched her for a long minute there was no sign of movement.

"Dead?" I asked.

The doctor shook his head. "Only fainted, I believe. Fainted with joy and surprize when she saw me. I couldn't wait for you; something called silently to me from the inside. I could feel it pulling and tugging against my wish to keep my promise. Finally I gave in and started through the tunnel. When I reached the wall here, she was sitting there beside the table. I tapped lightly on the glass and she turned her head and saw me. Without a sound that I could hear through this confounded wall, she threw up her arms and collapsed on the floor. Shock, I imagine.

"I shouted and called, but she didn't move. Then I heard footsteps behind me and guessed that it was you. What shall we do?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Maybe she will recover and let us in. Did you try to find a door?"

He shook his head. "No. I was too excited. Let us look for it."

We easily found a door, but searched in vain for a latch or keyhole. The transparent block was fastened with two immense hinges, and on the other side was a heavy bolt made of the same glasslike substance, but there was no sign of a catch on our side. Obviously the door was made to be opened only from the chamber.

"Step back," I ordered, and swung forward my rifle. "I'm going to blow off the bolt."

"I wouldn't do it, Dana," cautioned the doctor. "See, the door is hermetically sealed. The air here is fairly pure, but it may have leaked in from our own terrestrial atmosphere. The air inside—Dana, it may not be air at all. Suppose our visitor doesn't breathe oxygen. You may cause her death."

At that moment, the figure on the floor moved slightly, then turned on its side. I could see her face!

She was a brunette, tall for a woman and thin now from privation and hardship. Her face was wan and tired-looking but of an unearthly beauty that men imagine only in their dreams. Her lashes were heavy and black and so long that her short, probably bobbed, hair seemed scarcely longer. Her hands and feet were tiny but perfectly formed, while her long, supple fingers, even in their relaxed condition, radiated artistic ability and grace. Her lips were slightly parted, and as we watched breathlessly they compressed into a straight line of pain and suffering.

I could wait no longer. "Doctor," I repeated, "I've got to try it. While we stand here impotent, she is suffering, possibly dying. Get back."

Without waiting for an answer, I shoved forward the rifle, took careful aim at the transparent bolt, and fired. The crash in the narrow enclosed space was deafening. Without waiting to see what had happened, I fired again and yet again. Then, clubbing my rifle, I struck savagely with the butt against the glass. It gave. Slowly at first, and then more rapidly, the door swung on its heavy hinges and a delicate perfumed atmosphere swept out to meet us. I sighed in gratitude. The compartment contained air!

Hesitating only for a second to discover whether the room contained other occupants, I knelt down beside the girl and turned her gently over on her back. As I did so, her lashes raised and I gazed for the first time into her eyes. They were gray, deep and fathomless as the autumn skies, and proud. As I stared at her, I saw in their hidden depths a mounting gladness and surprize. With a little sigh, she lapsed into unconsciousness. I felt her pulse. It was weak but regular.

Dr. Frelinghusen knelt down and examined her with deft professional fingers.

"She will be all right in a few minutes," he concluded finally. "All that she needs is sunlight and fresh air."

"We will soon give her that," I said, "provided we can find our way out of this place."

"Give me just a minute, please," said the doctor. "We must look around. Perhaps the cube contained other occupants. Surely she would not have come alone."

I picked up the girl tenderly and carried her over to one of the two couches the chamber contained. In my arms she felt fragile and light, delicate as a rapier is delicate, yet capable of amazing endurance.

"Dana," called the doctor, "come here a moment, please."

I saw that he was bending over the other couch and hurried to his side. Covered only with a sheet, the body of an old man lay outstretched before us, his hands folded on his breast. From the first glance I knew that he was dead.

Dr. Frelinghusen bent over the body and then straightened. "He has been dead for years, Dana," he said. "Look, the body has been carefully embalmed." He pulled back the loose robe to show me, and we both started in surprize. High up on the right breast was a deep wound, evidently made by some sharply pointed weapon, probably a knife.

I searched the calm, noble features of the dead face and then turned to look at the unconscious girl. There was an obvious and easily noticeable resemblance. Each possessed the same long, oval face, the same delicate, sensitive nostrils and the same high forehead. It was an easy guess that they were father and daughter.

"Come," said the doctor, "there is nothing that we can do here."

We made a swift but hurried examination of the compartment. As I have stated, it was almost square in shape, approximately a hundred feet each way, and so high that we could not see the ceiling. At one end were a series of knobs and controls, together with a huge mechanism which filled in nearly the whole hundred feet of wall space. The apparatus resembled nothing so much as the control room of a submarine, except that the dials, levers and controllers were of unusual shape and design. I judged this to be the mechanism used to soften the fall of the cube and perhaps to open the doors as well.

Beside the controller boards was a desk on which lay an open book. The doctor gave it a hasty glance and then thrust the volume under his arm. Rows of somewhat similar books filled several long shelves near by.

A small room adjoining the main compartment had evidently been used for a provision room, as the floor was littered with many empty metallic cartons, while stacks of others, as yet unopened, lined the walls. I picked up one of them and found it filled with small cubes somewhat resembling the ones used here for bouillon and condensed soups.

A MOAN from the adjoining room recalled us to the main compartment. The girl had passed from her faint into a deep and troubled slumber. Her brows knit fiercely and she struggled and twitched as if to throw

off a heavy and depressing weight. Gazing at her, we visioned the terrific strain of the days and years which she had endured as a prisoner in a living tomb beside the body of her father. I marveled that it had been possible for any human being to live and stay sane through such tribulations.

"Come," said the doctor. "We have waited too long."

I took the girl into my arms and we prepared to leave the cube.

"What about him?" I asked, nodding at the body of the old man.

"We must leave him," said the doctor. "The cube may well become his final resting-place. I can think of none more fit."

Without another word we left the chamber. Glancing back as we passed through the door and down the corridor, I caught a last glimpse of the compartment, its immensity and its sadness. A faint air current from nowhere ruffled slightly the white shroud which we had replaced over the body of the old man. Over all hung an atmosphere of quiet and dignified sorrow. It seemed to me that the hidden lights which illuminated the room were already becoming a trifle dim.

The doctor shut behind us the glass door and we left him to his rest.

"I have a theory about this current," remarked the doctor, as we passed the line of non-conducting substance and felt again around us the ebb and flow of the unseen force. "It has just occurred to me at this instant. I believe that it is a part of the force which was used to break the fall of the cube. A variety of repellent electro-magnetism of which we know little here on earth. It is my theory that the entire cube, being of iron, was magnetized highly just before it entered the earth's atmosphere from the outer depths of space and that this magnetism served as a repellent force to ease the fall.

"By the passage of time, since the cube landed, most of the force has undoubtedly been dissipated, but some remnant clings to the metal with enough strength to be felt.

"I also believe," he added, "that before the shock of arrival the compartment was much higher in the cube. Some method must have been employed to break the interior shock which, no matter how lightly the cube landed, necessarily was great. I will wager that the entire interior of the cube is hollow and once constituted an immense air cushion."

"Perhaps some day you may be able to prove your theories," I suggested.

"Perhaps," he replied, "although I doubt if we shall ever have the opportunity. Haven't you forgotten something?"

As he asked the question we passed across the darkness line and the force of the current left us. At the entrance where there should have been bright daylight there was now but a faint glow. I shifted the body of the girl slightly in my arms and hurried forward. At the mouth of the tunnel, we stopped in surprize.

We had evidently passed many hours in the depths of the cube. When we entered, it could not have been later than noon, but now it was practically night. Ahead of us, scarcely a quarter of a mile away, gleamed a forgotten lamplight from our cabin.

The doctor repeated his question in another form. "Has it escaped your memory, Dana, that today, or rather tonight, is quite an important date?"

I stared at him stupidly.

"What do you mean?"

"Today," he said, "was the 25th of July, 1925. Four years ago today the cube in which"—he gestured at the girl in my arms—"in which we found this young lady, arrived within the atmospheric limits of the earth. And tonight"—he paused to emphasize his remark—"tonight another cube is scheduled to arrive and we

shall very probably not survive the shock of impact."

"You mean," I asked, staring down at the girl, "that we have rescued her only to die?"

The doctor strode ahead of me into the darkness. "It looks very much that way," he replied dryly.

As if to furnish her own answer to my question, the girl stirred in my arms. As I looked down at her, the thought of our mutual destruction seemed incredible, impossible. Life was suddenly very desirable and full of possibilities. I now had something, for the first time in my life, to care for and to cherish. I could not believe that destiny had allowed me to find her only to lose her at once. It would be too unfair.

The doctor looked at his watch. "It is now 7 o'clock," he stated. "By our calculations we have some three and a half hours before the impact. I had planned on retiring to the edge of the plateau before then, although even there our danger would be great. However, with the girl a movement of any distance is not to be thought of. In her exhausted condition it would certainly kill her."

"You might go alone," I suggested.

We had arrived at the cabin and he stepped across the threshold and turned down the covers on his cot for my burden before replying.

"You know better than to say that, Dana," he said.

I did indeed. The old doctor thought too much of me and had too much courage within his own spare body for desertion of a friend. It would be the two of us together until the end. No, not two: there would be three of us. I looked down at the bed to find the gray eyes of the girl wide open and staring at me unbelievingly.

It was then she spoke, and for the first time I heard the liquid, melodic tones which have haunted me, asleep or awake, forever after. The syllables which she uttered have escaped me now, but at the time it was enough that she spoke. I do remember that I held her hands and whispered soft nothings into her ear while the doctor busied himself in preparing a cup of tea and some soup. She accepted the refreshments gratefully and thanked us softly in words which, although unintelligible to us, seemed to fit the situation perfectly.

When she had finished, she passed her hands lightly before her eyes to show that she was weary. Covering her over with a blanket, we left her to rest as we prepared our dinner.

While we were eating, we discussed in low tones the probable happenings of the night and what precautions, if any, could be taken to insure our safety. We at last decided that nothing could be done and that our lives depended upon the distance between ourselves and the point of impact.

"It will be all luck," remarked the doctor. "If the cube arrives—and I believe it will—the heat will probably kill us if the shock doesn't."

"And is there nothing that we can do?"

"Nothing except hope—and pray if you believe in prayers."

The soft voice sounded again in our ears and we turned to discover the girl sitting erect on her cot. With rare intelligence she appreciated the uselessness of her language in the present situation and immediately resorted to the sign symbols of a forgotten era. Pointing to the sky, she mutely asked us a question.

"What does she mean?" asked the doctor.

Seeing that we did not comprehend, she arose from her cot and, swaying slightly, walked to the solitary window of the cabin. We sprang to her assistance and reinforced her strength with our own.

THE moon had risen through a faint cloud of vapor but there was sufficient light from its rays to distinguish objects on the plateau. Anxiously, the girl counted the giant cubes in the

little valley and we, watching, noted her lightened expression when she discovered that the blocks numbered only seven.

Then she turned to us and repeated her former expressive gesture.

"Dana," gasped Dr. Frelinghusen, "I believe she is trying to ask us when the next sky visitor will arrive." Pointing at the sky, he swept his finger downward in a straight line until it was directed at the one vacant spot in the circle of metallic giants. Then he imitated as well as he could the girl's expression of questioning.

To our great surprize and relief, she behaved as if she understood, and nodded.

The doctor pulled out his watch. It was then 10 o'clock. Swiftly he pointed out the space on the dial between the hour and 10:45. He then repeated his gesture at the heavens.

The girl watched for an interval the swiftly moving hands on the dial and then evidently comprehended, for her face changed quickly from interest to excitement and then to stark terror. Pushing aside our restraining hands, she opened the cabin door and ran outside.

Following, we watched her gaze search the heavens anxiously as if fearful of what she might behold. Then she turned to us and we saw that she had regained control of herself. The soft lips had tightened into a single straight line while the gray eyes sparkled and flashed.

The fear was vanished and in its place we saw anger—a terrible anger which frightened us by its fearful vindictiveness. For an instant forgetful of our presence, she turned her face to the heavens and from those tender lips poured forth a flood of words—eager, wrathful, courageous words. Her tones were now as harsh and threatening as before they had been melodious.

"Dana," whispered the doctor, "I believe she is swearing vengeance toward those who are to come. Did you ever experience such hate?"

"Possibly," I hazarded, "those who are coming are those who killed her father and sent her adventuring alone through space."

Although I had spoken the words softly, by some intuition she understood and turned toward me, nodding sadly. Her anger had vanished, leaving behind it only a saddened and despairing woman. It was clear that she had nearly reached the breaking-point and was ready now for human sympathy and companionship. We offered her our outstretched hands.

She met us half-way, one hand held out to each of us. The doctor took her in his arms, and she sobbed brokenly upon his shoulder, suddenly transformed into a queer, forlorn, approachable little person who needed us.

The doctor comforted and soothed her while I went back into the cabin for a blanket to throw around her lightly clad shoulders. When I returned, we sat down in the shadow of the nearest cube, three adventurers waiting for what fate might bring to us. The girl curled up beside me in seeming content, and when I offered her my coat for a cushion, she thanked me in that soft low voice of hers.

None of us wanted to be shut indoors to miss what was coming. As I look back now on the mad happenings of that moonlit night in the Andes, it seems to me that we anticipated our adventure with eager courage and gay foolhardiness. At any rate, we settled ourselves calmly to view a sight the like of which had probably never before been seen by man—and we did it with as much nonchalance as though we were to witness a performance of the opera.

WE HAD not long to wait. During the last few minutes the mist overhead had thickened until the moon, air messenger of cheeriness and hope, had given up the struggle

and hidden away behind the encroaching clouds.

I looked at my watch. It was 10:40 p. m.

"I don't imagine we shall see much of it, until the cube is very near," said the doctor. "Perhaps we shall never see it at all. If we don't, here's good luck, Dana." He held out his hand, which I shook gravely, unconscious at the moment of the opera bouffé character of our performance. The girl, also, seemed to enter into the spirit of the occasion and sedately offered her hand to each of us in turn. The doctor shook it heartily, but I retained it, conscious even at that intense moment of a current which strangely vibrated between us, a magnetic current which told subtly of good cheer and a promise of what was to come.

"Dana," cried the doctor, "it is coming. Look!"

The heavens above us were becoming illuminated, slowly changing their customary blackness for a soft vibrant shade of green. The color was comparable to nothing except the burning of copper metal in a white-hot flame. Reflected from cloud to cloud, the rays at last struck the ground and our faces, giving the whole locality an unearthly greenish tinge.

As we watched, the green color swiftly faded. I looked at my watch. It was 10:44 p. m.

"Something is wrong," muttered the doctor. "If the cube had entered the atmosphere it should be here now, unless they have slowed it even more than——"

Even as he spoke, the light appeared again, this time reddish in shade. Swiftly it deepened, increased in power, lightened the entire sky, changed quickly to pink, to white, to an overpowering dazzling white, then became more powerful, more dazzling, incandescent, white-hot.

"It's here, Dana! It's here!" screamed the doctor. "Give me your hand; we will try to stay together."

Swiftly I caught the woman to me and reached for his arm.

At the same instant, it struck.

A world arose in torment and overwhelmed us. Somewhere, as if in a vision, I have a memory of a vague shape, a thousand furnaces magnified, hovering just over our heads. Then the light became too strong and blinded me.

It seemed years before we felt the shock. I was conscious first of swift winds that picked us up and whirled us with terrific force as tiny gnats caught in an air whirlpool are tossed beside a flame. Then came a crash as of a thousand railroad trains crashing together head on—a deafening, ear-splitting crash that swallowed our lives, dissected and ended us.

As I passed into darkness I was still vaguely conscious of the feminine figure clasped tightly against my breast. I remember that even then I was glad to finish—so.

Followed a long, endless interval of utter blankness.

I RECOVERED my senses with a snap as if a chord somewhere had come back into tune. I was lying flat on my face in a sea of mud while a driving, unreal rain pelted my head and shoulders. Under me was the body of the girl, protected even to the end. I looked for the body of the doctor. It was nowhere in sight. Nothing could be seen of the cabin, which had been only a little distance away.

I staggered to my feet and took my bearings from the newly arrived cube. It had landed precisely in the vacancy left in the circle of iron monsters. From its location, I guessed the direction of the cabin.

For the second time in that day of incredible strain and tender emotions, I picked up the girl, held her close in my arms and staggered up the torn and littered pathway. All things were changed. The creek which previously had meandered between us and the cabin had now disappeared,

leaving only its tortuous course to indicate that it had ever existed. The air was filled with the smell of molten iron, that close unwholesome odor experienced only in the vicinity of huge foundries. Beating down constantly upon us was the rain, in itself a phenomenon at that season.

A hissing sound filled the air, long-drawn and vibrant, as a giant snake hisses when aroused to deadly anger and fear. It was occasioned, I saw, by the cooling rain striking against the hot iron of the eighth projectile, the surface of which was already turning black. Above us in the heavens, mighty winds yet blew wildly, enraged perhaps at the intruder which had passed through them unscathed. Small fires here and there fought vainly against the rain which was remorselessly extinguishing them. As yet they gave sufficient light to illuminate the scene.

I was past all feeling or caring. All I knew was that somewhere ahead of me was a possible shelter from the elements and that I must reach it before my senses again left me. Luckily the distance was not far, or I should never have made it.

Seen by the fitful glare of the occasional flames, the cabin appeared not badly damaged. One corner of the roof was partly wrecked, but aside from that it was almost untouched. Its lack of height and the solid manner in which it had been built combined to save it.

I placed the girl on her cot and knelt down beside her. I believed that she was dead, and in the anguish of the moment buried my head in the fold of her dress and sobbed in my despair. We were so futile, two tiny insects combating a strange and cruel antagonist. We two against a universe enraged.

After a time, the spell passed. I remembered the doctor and raised myself wearily to my feet, intending to search for his body. Caught as he was in the tumult of the night's furies, it never occurred to me that he might have escaped.

As I reached the door, however, I saw him coming up the path, a wavering black shadow careening from side to side.

"Thank God you are safe, Dana!" he said. "We three have witnessed a miracle this night."

I nodded wearily. "Yes, Doctor, but I am afraid that where there were three of us, there are only two remaining. Come and look."

"Nonsense. If two of us could come through that inferno, why not three of us? Let me look at her."

I stood aside and waited in silence as he made his examination.

"Pshaw," he said, "you have been imagining things. A few hours' rest and she will be as good as ever. She was created fortunate." And he smoothed the dark hair away from her face with a tenderness that I had never dreamed he possessed. "Leave her alone, Dana," he ordered, "and get some sleep yourself. I am too old to care for two patients."

I listened to his orders, and despite myself was forced to strip off my wet clothing and relax upon the other cot. The rain, occasioned I suspected by the atmospheric disturbance in the same manner as similar rains were caused by constant cannonading in France, beat fiercely against the walls.

My last memory before sleep overcame me was a picture of the doctor, his white hairs all awry and his clothes dripping with water, as he concentrated with customary self-forgetfulness upon the curiously shaped book which he had plundered, how long ago it seemed, from the cabin of the seventh cube only that afternoon.

As I fell asleep, I had a vague memory of his face. It was stamped with an expression of great wonder and a glorious air of surprize. Idly, I wondered what he had discovered.

After that I remember no more.

I dreamed of the Chinese torture of the falling water, a horrible dream wherein I was bound fast in an immense carved chair with my head forced back by silken strands so that a sweet-smelling liquid fell drop by drop in deadening regularity upon a certain spot on my forehead. Hour after hour it continued, monotonous and nerve-racking as it sapped my will and my sanity. I strove to move my head even a fraction of an inch. It was impossible. I screamed long and loud. From somewhere near by came a tinkling laugh as of tiny silver bells.

I wakened, instinctively aware that I had made an ass of myself. The rain, which had strengthened into a steady downpour, at last had found a passageway through the thatch overhead and was falling in evenly timed drops upon my forehead. It was morning. Shamefaced, I sat up to meet the quizzical gray eyes of my lady of the cube.

"Come, Dana," sounded the voice of the doctor behind me, "breakfast is ready and I need your help."

IT WAS difficult to think of eating after the unreal and impossible events we had passed through. In spite of myself, as I dressed I stole a glance through the broken window-frame to find out whether the events of the night had really taken place or whether they existed only in my imagination.

The soil of the valley was torn and tossed about from the force of the convulsion. In a great circle stood the iron monstrosities, their sides sleek and glittering in the downpour. I counted them. There were eight. It was all true then!

From the eighth cube a faint wisp of smoke yet arose, to be driven away and dissipated by the rain. It seemed impossible to realize that it had really arrived from a port unknown during the night.

The doctor's voice sounded again behind me and I stopped my pondering to hurry into the other room. As I went, I whistled merrily. After all, it was over and we had escaped. Life seemed very good.

An anxious and feverishly drawn expression on the face of Dr. Frelinghusen partly sobered me.

"Hurry, Dana," he said; "there is much to be done."

I saw at once that the night had been a sleepless one for him and wondered what it was he had discovered that so worried him.

"Breakfast first, then business," he declared, interrupting my half-spoken question. In spite of our anxiety and the strangeness of the girl to everything, for the doctor and me the meal was an amusing one.

Our customs to her were doubtless bizarre and unusual, but she adapted herself with an ease which made the strangeness scarcely noticeable. I did observe surreptitiously that she disdained meat and the heavy brown bread which was the principal article of our diet but satisfied herself with tropical fruits, vegetables and water. A light wine which the doctor served was tasted and then courteously ignored.

Breakfast over, the doctor summoned us into executive council before his work desk.

"In the first place," he said, "I want to introduce you to Miss-ah"—and he turned to his notes—"Miss Aien——" He stopped abruptly. The girl's face had colored excitedly and she flung herself at him with a torrent of words. Without attempting to reply, he motioned her to a chair.

"Miss Aien," he continued, "is, or rather was, the daughter of a citizen, an inventor I might say, of a world somewhere in space. Where it is and what are the customs I do not know. Perhaps we shall never know until she tells us herself."

"Dr. Frelinghusen," I interrupted, "tell me how you know her name

and where she is from and all the rest of it."

The old doctor smiled. It was his moment of triumph.

"Dana," he said, "the log book of the seventh cube tells the entire story. See here!" He exhibited the curiously shaped volume which he had carried away under his arm. "During the night I deciphered part of it. How I did it is of no importance at this time. It is enough that I succeeded.

"As I was saying before you interrupted me, Aien's father was an inventor. He was the originator of those——" He pointed largely toward the monsters outside. "The world in which they lived, as far as I have been able to interpret the diary, was a very old world, a very old world indeed—perhaps much like this earth as it will be a hundred million years or more from now, when most of the atmosphere has seeped away into space, when the rivers have run dry and the earth heat is cooling so rapidly that life is becoming impossible.

"The father, according to his diary, was the hope of a dying planet —or world; perhaps it was not a planet. At least it is true that he was the genius on which a race was relying to save them from extinction. In his invention they saw a possibility of escape, a way to transport at least a part of their population to a new world and escape death, the inevitable end.

"Therefore, over a long period of time—just how long I am unable to ascertain—they supported his experiments at government expense. For their failing energies it must have been a tremendous effort. Year after year the experiments continued and at last were successful in that a series of cubes were, at favorable intervals, dispatched from their world and landed upon ours; successfully landed, that is, arriving so lightly that living beings might reasonably hope to occupy the projectiles and not be killed by the shock.

"Everything was ready for an attempted interplanetary invasion of this earth—an invasion of a world of immigrants. How they knew that the earth was habitable, I don't know, but evidently they had discovered enough facts about us to lead them to believe that it was.

"Of course during the progress of these experiments there had been jealousy, ignorance and fear for the old inventor to fight—jealousy on the part of rival inventors, ignorance on the part of the great mass of the people which, as on our own planet, were necessarily far below their leaders in intelligence.

"But greater even than these difficulties was the overpowering necessity for haste—a haste made necessary because their world was swiftly dying and even the leaders had begun to be panic-stricken. It was this last factor which proved the inventor's undoing.

"Everything was ready for the last test projectile to be dispatched containing a picked crew of men who were to be the advance guard of a people. At the last moment something, I don't know what, happened. According to the diary, there was a riot, the picked crew was ordered out and a group of cowardly political leaders attempted to take their place and save their own skins.

"Somehow, in the turmoil, the old inventor and his daughter succeeded in getting inside the cube and commenced the voyage alone. This, however, did not happen until the father had received a serious stab wound. He must have died en route, and, alone in the cube, Aien embalmed his body. Probably he died so suddenly that he was unable to give her directions for opening the doors to the outside world, and she faced a living death here in this valley for four

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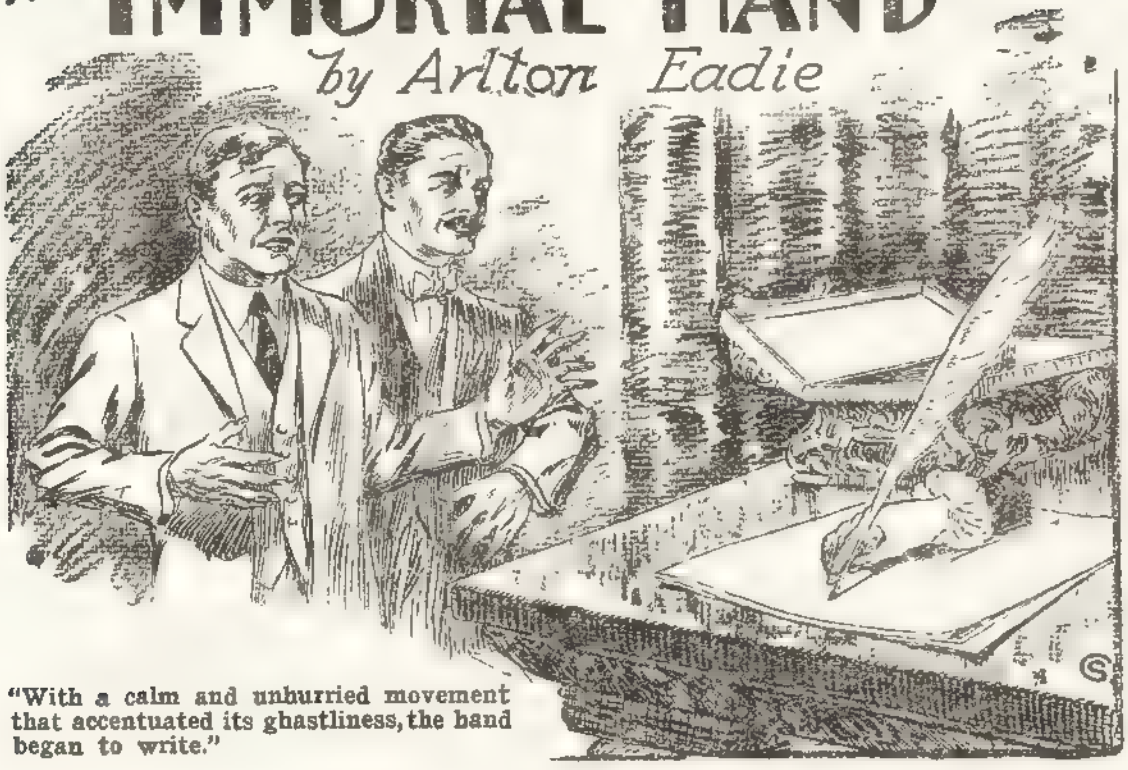
The IMMORTAL HAND

by Arlton Eadie



"With a calm and unhurried movement that accentuated its ghastliness, the hand began to write."

"AT LAST the Mecca of our pilgrimage is in sight!"

Wilmer Denton paused in the middle of Henley Street, that Old World thoroughfare that slants across the center of the little town of Stratford-on-Avon, and waved his hand dramatically toward a house on the opposite side of the way. Long, low, its time-mellowed walls crossed with those massive beams of timber which form so picturesque a feature of houses built in the Sixteenth Century; with its three-gabled roof and quaint pent-house over the door, it was the most famous, most photographed, and most venerated private dwelling in Europe—the birthplace of William Shakespeare.

"Doesn't it just thrill you, boys," Wilmer went on, "to think that you are standing within a few yards of the very spot where the foremost poet of his day—'the sweet Swan of Avon'—'mellifluous-tongued Shakespeare'—'the Wonder of the Ages'—first saw the light?"

I should explain that Wilmer is an actor, and sometimes his private utterances are likely to be more than a little tinged with his professional art. After he had rolled out the measured periods of his eulogy, he glanced at Dick Kinnaird and me as though expecting a round of applause. But neither of us felt in the humor to go into ecstasies just then.

"If you will pardon my breaking in upon your meditations with vulgar, mundane matters," I said gently, "I should like to remind you that it is past 10 o'clock; that the night promises to be cold as well as wet; and that we have failed so far in our efforts to obtain accommodation for the night. It may possibly have escaped your memory that we have already applied at most of the hotels in the town, only

to find—as is only natural during the annual festival celebrations — that they are full up. This may be historic ground—I am quite willing to take your word for it—but I do not relish the prospect of having to sleep on it! So I propose that we get a move on."

"I second that," chimed in Dick Kinnaird. "In the morning I will be quite willing to view every relic, no matter how dubious, of the country-bumpkin play-actor whom, with a faith that is as touching as it is uncritical, you credit with the authorship of the immortal works. Meanwhile, as the poet himself says, 'Come on, then, let's to bed'—that is, if we can find one!"

Although quite normal in other respects, Dick Kinnaird held the unshakable belief that the whole of the works usually attributed to Shakespeare were in reality written by a gentleman known as Lord Bacon, who was living at the same time. Wilmer, on the other hand, regarded such an opinion as the vilest heresy. Each was a red-hot partizan, and many a long and heated argument had ensued between them on the subject. On one previous occasion they had come to actual blows, and I had no desire to see the contest renewed before the birthplace of the poet with me as the unwilling referee. I hastened to change the subject.

"Perhaps our driver will know of some vacant lodgings," I suggested, indicating the patriarch who sat dozing on the box of the ancient vehicle which we had chartered at the station.

"Good idea," agreed Wilmer. "Consult the oracle forthwith."

The driver was a venerable old gentleman with a long white beard. Had he been robed in a sheet, with an hour-glass slung at his girdle and a scythe in his hand, he would have made a very fair impersonation of old Father Time. Unfortunately he was a little deaf, and it was only on the third repetition of my question that a glimmer of understanding showed in his watery eyes.

"Whoi, I doan roightly know, zur," he said in his broad Warwickshire dialect. "Maybes old Martha Condell 'ud be willing to put 'ee up for the noight."

I jumped at the idea. "She has a vacant room?" I asked eagerly.

"Well, zur, she has a room, sartinly, and it's empty, as 'ee say, but"—he paused and shook his head slowly—"maybes ye'd better seek sumwheres else, arter all."

"Why?" I demanded. The man's manner puzzled me.

"It be a main queer sort o' room, that o' Martha Condell's," he answered.

"What's wrong with it, anyway?" put in Wilmer.

The old man favored him with a prolonged stare; then took off his battered hat and scratched his head. "Maybes that ain't for me to say, zur," he replied at last. "Her house be 'unnerds o' years old, with queer old furniture, an'—an' there be things there——"

"Things?" I echoed.

"Queer, creepy things. Cur'osities some folk may call 'em, but to my moind sichloike didn't ought to be kep' above ground. The graveyard's the place for the loike o' they, surely!"

Dick Kinnaird turned a bewildered face to me. "What can he mean?" he muttered.

"I don't know, and I don't greatly care." I pulled open the door of the cab as I spoke, and motioned them to enter. The rain was now falling with a steadiness that proved it to be no passing April shower, and a bleak east wind was rising. "I'd rather sleep in a veritable chamber of horrors than remain out longer on a night like this. Go ahead, driver!"

At a leisurely pace the cab began to thread its way through the now deserted streets. As it turned to the

right I caught a glimpse of the rain-lashed waters of the Avon; then we left the river road and a few minutes later came to a halt before a small, detached house standing almost in the shadow of the ancient gray tower of the Guild Chapel. In response to our knock the door was opened by a short, frail-looking old lady. Wilmer, electing himself as spokesman, addressed her with his most fascinating smile.

She seemed somewhat taken aback by his request for a room, and for several moments stood as though in thought. When at length she spoke, it was in the quiet, self-possessed accents of a cultured woman.

"I am not in the habit of taking boarders," she said, "but you may stay here if you wish. It certainly is a very wretched night." She made the last observation in a tone which seemed to imply that she was seeking an excuse to justify a departure from her usual rule. "Perhaps it would be as well not to dismiss your cab until you have seen the room. It may possibly not be to your liking."

A vague sense of misgiving came over me as she spoke. It seemed as though her words held some sinister meaning. The next moment the feeling passed. We were not in position to be fastidious.

"There's no need for us to see the room, Madam," I told her cheerfully. "So long as it has a roof and four walls we will be satisfied."

THE moment I crossed the threshold I got my first surprize. The exterior of the house had seemed commonplace enough. Like so many of the old houses in the town, it had at some recent time been faced with common red brick, which made it appear comparatively modern; but the interior was a perfect gem of unspoilt, antique beauty. The tiny hall into which we stepped was paneled with age-blackened oak; the steep, narrow staircase was flanked by carved balustrades of the Elizabethan period; while the bedroom into which we were finally ushered would have set the heart of an antiquarian beating with delight. No false modern note jarred upon its tranquil, Old World charm. The arched stone fireplace was pure Tudor; the leaded casement still retained the tiny, greenish panes of the original blown glass; the furniture would have fetched a small fortune in a London salesroom.

I could not repress a cry of amazement as I surveyed the room.

"Why, this should be one of the show places of Stratford!" I declared with enthusiasm.

A slight flush of pleasure appeared on the pale features of our hostess.

"Yes, it is certainly a very old house," she said quietly. "It has belonged to our family for generations—in fact, the Condells were living here at the same time that the great William Shakespeare lived at the New Place, which, as you may remember, was the house he bought when he left London, in the year 1611, and came here to spend the last few years of his life as an honored and wealthy citizen of his native town."

A muttered exclamation from Wilmer caused me to glance toward him.

"Condell—Condell"—he was repeating the name with the air of one who strives to capture an elusive memory—"surely I've heard that name before. Why, of course—Henry Condell and John Heminge were two of Shakespeare's company of players, to whom he bequeathed legacies for mourning rings in his famous will. It was they who edited and published the first complete folio of his plays in 1623."

"I am descended from that same Henry Condell," said the old lady with quite excusable pride. "This house formed part of the New Place estate, and, before dying, Shakespeare presented it to his old fellow-player. There existed a strong bond of affection between the two, for Henry Condell was himself no mean poet. It

is said that he composed the lines that are carved on this box."

Quickly crossing the room, she took from the sideboard a small wooden casket and handed it to Wilmer. No sooner had he brought it within the range of the single candle which lighted the room than an exclamation of surprize escaped him. Attracted by his evident agitation, I stepped to his side, but he waved me back impatiently and turned to the woman.

"Have you read the lines that are written here?" he asked in a voice that he vainly tried to keep natural.

"I have not even seen them, sir," came the quiet answer. "I was born blind."

Blind! I peered closely into the withered face and saw that she indeed spoke the truth. Yet so alert and assured had been her movements that the revelation came as a sudden shock. I began to murmur some words of sympathy, but she cut them short.

"I have lived here so long that I know every step, every nook and corner and, as I very seldom stir out of doors, my affliction does not hamper my movements. Is the room to your liking, gentlemen?"

We hastened to assure her that it suited us in every way. Whereupon, after wishing us a good night's rest, the old dame took her departure. Scarcely had the door closed on her when Wilmer was holding out the casket with trembling hands.

"What a find! What priceless luck! Here's a hitherto unsuspected relic of Shakespeare—and *such* a relic! There, read that."

As he spoke he pointed to some lines carved on the lid in strange, old-fashioned characters. I read them out slowly:

Pause, Reader! Gaze with uncover'd Head
On these Relicks of yᵉ Immortal Dead!
A Poet's Hande, whych, in byegone Dayes,
Gave to yᵉ Worlde full six-and-thirtie Playes.
Also hys Pen, whych hee, lyke a magick Speare,
Did Shake o'er Mankind, drawing Smile or Teare.
By subtyl Arts preserved against Decay,
They'll last untyl hys Fame be pass'd away.

Wilmer Denton laid a shaking hand on my arm. "Don't you understand?" he cried. "Inside that casket rests the hand of Shakespeare!"

Wondering, incredulous, still scarcely realizing the tremendous import of his words, I stood staring dully at the little oblong box. Then I put forth my hand to raise the lid. For a second it resisted my efforts, then suddenly sprang upward. As it did so, the sides of the casket, which were hinged, fell away, revealing an inner casket either of clear glass or crystal. This was completely filled with some colorless liquid, and suspended in it was a human hand. Apparently it had been severed from the arm at a spot a few inches above the wrist, but the actual cut was hidden by a portion of red velvet sleeve terminating in a turned-back linen cuff. Between the slender, tapering fingers was a goose-quill pen, held as if in the act of writing.

DICK KINNAIRD was the first to break the awe-struck silence.

"It's modeled in wax—it must be! No dead flesh could remain so firm and lifelike."

Without replying, Wilmer bent over and closely examined the grim souvenir. Then he straightened up and shook his head.

"If that is a model it is the most realistic one ever made," he declared with conviction. "I can even see the tiny hairs on the back of the hand. Moreover, what would be the object in placing a wax replica in spirit? No, no, it's my firm belief that we are looking at the actual hand of the poet. At all events, I think the inscription on the lid is sufficient to set all doubts at rest concerning the authorship of the plays."

"I can not see how," returned Dick with an obstinate frown. "It certainly does not mention the poet by name."

"Indeed?" shrugged Wilmer. "Read the lines again:

Also his pen, which he, like a magic *Speare*,
Did *Shake* o'er mankind.

"Why, the allusion to Shakespeare's name is obvious. Such a play on words is quite in the spirit of the age."

But Dick was far from being convinced. He took up the crystal casket and held it on a level with his eyes.

"I think you're taking too much for granted," he said. "I've seen preserved anatomical specimens before, and they've always appeared bleached, withered and altogether unnatural-looking; while this is so perfect that one might almost imagine the blood to be still coursing through its veins. But, whether it be artificial or real, I still hold to my opinion. I'm willing to stake my soul that this hand never penned—my God!"

He uttered the final words with a gasping cry, his tone of lofty contempt giving place to one of shivering horror.

"What happened?" I stepped forward as I asked the question.

He hastily replaced the casket on the table and wiped the moisture from a face which had suddenly gone gray-white.

"It moved!" he whispered hoarsely. "As I am a living man, that hand moved as I said the words!"

"Nonsense," interposed Wilmer. "Probably you shook the casket."

"I tell you it moved of its own accord," persisted Dick with a shudder. "And it's moving now! Look! Look!"

For a full minute we gazed in silence at the gruesome fragment of humanity. Yes, it certainly seemed as if a slight movement was agitating it, and at first I, like Wilmer, set this down to the disturbance of the preserving medium in which it was immersed. But the next moment I knew this could not be the explanation. For the fingers that held the pen were flexing in such a manner as no chance current could account for. The others saw it, too.

"By heaven! you're right!" Wilmer gasped. "It's forming letters—writing! Merciful God! the hand of Shakespeare is spelling out a message from the grave!"

Then, as we stood spellbound with horror, scarcely daring to credit the evidence of our senses, we saw the thing happen. With a movement so calm and unhurried that it only accentuated its ghastliness, the hand began to write. Although the pen made no mark, we were easily able to recognize each letter as it was formed:

If ye desire proof to seize,
Emulate the feat of Ulysses.

Just those words; then the hand was still once more.

For a space we remained tense and breathless, waiting in vain for the message to be continued. Then Wilmer turned to me with a question.

"Before we let this go any further we'd better check our impressions." He drew his notebook from his pocket as he spoke. "What was the message you saw traced?"

I repeated the strange, unmeaning couplet, and Dick Kinnaird confirmed it.

"That was my own impression, but I thought I must be mistaken," said Wilmer as he copied the words down in his book. "We must have misread the message—there's no sense in it. How is it possible for us to emulate the feat of Ulysses?"

Dick Kinnaird gave an unsteady laugh. "The hero of Homer's *Odyssey* is supposed to have performed many marvelous feats during his voyages. We're in for a fairly exciting time if we've got to imitate them all. There must be another meaning——"

"Wait!" I interrupted suddenly, as an idea flashed through my mind.

As is so often the case when one is perplexed, I had allowed my eyes to roam idly round the room. Without

consciously doing so, I noted the low, molded ceiling, the huge oaken chest beneath the window, the high-backed old chairs, the carved chimney-piece of unusual and fantastic design. Its ornamentation consisted of a series of small but beautifully executed figures taken from the mythology of ancient Greece: graceful nymphs, sporting fauns, grinning satyrs, heroes, gods and goddesses were there; while forming the keystone of the arch was a huge Cyclops' head having a single staring eye in the center of its forehead. The moment my eyes lighted on it I knew that I had found the key to the baffling couplet.

"The feat of Ulysses!" I cried, pointing to the repulsive countenance of the carved giant. "Don't you remember how, when captured by the Cyclops, he made his escape by thrusting out the single eye of the giant Polyphemus?"

In a flash they understood. Almost before I had finished speaking, Wilmer's finger was on the eyeball, pressing it inward with all his force. At the same moment, almost without a sound, a portion of the wall-paneling swung forward, revealing a narrow, doorlike aperture.

"There's another room beyond!" cried Dick, snatching up the candle and peering through. Then he entered boldly. We were close at his heels.

TO MY surprize, it was no tiny hiding-place that we entered, but a room, tall, spacious and elegantly furnished in the fashion of an age long past. Rows of well-filled bookshelves covered one wall; beneath them was set a long bench bearing piles of untidy-looking manuscripts. A much-used desk stood on one side; near it was a table having upon it a large, silver-gilt bowl filled with still-blooming roses. In one corner rested a long, cup-hilted sword. There was no trace of dust, no dead, musty odor to denote a room long sealed up.

"We must have penetrated into one of the adjoining houses," whispered Dick Kinnaird. "Those flowers are still fresh——"

It was then that we heard the footsteps.

At first they were so faint that it was only by senses strained to the utmost limit of expectancy—as you may be sure ours were at the moment—that they could be detected at all. Slow, intermittent, with a pause of varying length every now and then, they sounded like the steps of one who paces about deep in thought.

"They're coming from the next room—in there," breathed Wilmer, jabbing his finger in the direction of a door on the opposite side of the room to which we had entered. I nodded silently and, drawn by a curiosity which overmastered my fear, crept forward and listened. The steps were louder now, and, mingled with them, came the sound of a voice speaking in low, measured tones. I have listened to some famous actors both before and since that time, but never have I heard such flowing music as I did in that silent, half-lit room in Stratford-on-Avon. My mind likened the words to a stream of molten gold, interspersed every now and then with the gleam of a precious jewel:

I have bedimm'd
The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rivèd Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt: the strong-bas'd promontory
Have I made shake: and by the spurs plucked up
The pine and cedar; graves, at my command,
Have wak'd their sleepers, oped, and let them forth
By my so potent art. But this rough magic
I here abjure; and, when I have requir'd
Some heavenly music (which even now I do)
To work mine end upon their senses, that
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And, deeper than did ever plummet sound,
I'll drown my Book.

As the wondrous voice ceased, a shout from Wilmer caused me to swing round. He had crossed to the piles of manuscripts and was turning them over with feverish eagerness.

"See here, you fellows! Here's something that's worth fifty times its weight in gold. Manuscript plays—originals—in Shakespeare's own handwriting—dozens of 'em! Look at the titles—*Troilus and Cressida*—*The Winter's Tale*—*Love's Labour Lost*—And what's this? *Love's Labour Won?* Evidently an unknown play. Here's *Hamlet*. As I've always suspected, it's been adapted from an older play—look at those interlinear additions. *Timon of Athens*—why, when you consider that, apart from his signatures, there is not a single line of his handwriting in existence, the contents of this room must be absolutely priceless!"

The door at the farther end of the room slowly opened. Framed in the aperture, like a portrait limned by a master hand, was a figure which, though now seen for the first time, seemed like that of a familiar friend. Impossible to mistake that pale, oval face, crowned by the finely arched forehead and lofty brow; those firm, humorous lips half concealed by the short auburn beard; those deep, all-seeing eyes. It was the shade of the man whose name will live as long as the English tongue is spoken.

With slow, easy steps the spirit came toward us, and we, as though impelled by some supreme, dominating will, retreated backward pace for pace. Reaching the table, he stretched forth his hand over the pile of writings with a tender, caressing movement. Then, with a graceful half-sweep of his arm—a gesture that could not have been acquired otherwise than on the stage—he pointed to the door by which we had entered.

I stood like a man dazed. My mind was a welter of conflicting desires. I longed to stay, to question the apparition, to examine those precious papers on the table, to handle the "silver-gilt bowl" and "sword" which might be the very articles mentioned in the poet's will. For a moment I fought the mysterious force that seemed to be compelling me to obey that unspoken command. Then, as I turned and groped blindly for the door, I heard in the distance a faint cock-crow heralding the coming dawn.

After that, my mind was blank. I have no recollection of passing through the dividing wall, and certainly none of the display of nervous hysteria to which my companions assert I gave way. My next clear memory is finding myself back in our bedroom, with the secret door shut fast and the cold light of the April dawn stealing through the leaded casement.

"Hullo, old man. Feeling better?" Wilmer bent over me as I lay and slapped me heartily on the shoulder. "You've had a nasty dose of ghost-shock!"

He had his coat off and his shirt sleeves rolled up. In his hand he held a long screw-driver, obtained from heaven alone knows where.

"I'm about to open that secret door," he went on in answer to my look of astonishment.

"You have only to press the eye—"

He shook his head. "I've tried that, but there's nothing doing. The door is screwed up."

"*Screwed up?* Impossible! It opened easily enough last night."

"Look for yourself. There—and there—and there."

As he spoke he indicated a row of screw-heads, counter-sunk flush with the woodwork. Encrusted with rust as they were, it seemed as though they had been there for years.

I watched him in silence as he set to work and, not without difficulty, extracted the screws. As the last one came away the door swung open of its own accord. A simultaneous gasp

(Continued on page 425)

Visions in Smoke

By **RUFUS W. LANDON**

The quivering smoke-wreaths of my cigarette
  Curl slowly upward in the silent room,
Ensnaring straying sunbeams in a net
  Ethereal, woven on a magic loom.
Aloft, there hovers on the atmosphere
  A rippling haze through which the sunlight gleams,
And from its iridescent folds appear
  Fantastic images that fade like dreams.
A blue expanse of ocean I behold,
  Whose rolling billows seem to meet the sky,
And far below, vast stores of gems and gold
  Within their coral caves half buried lie.
Their luster falls upon the rotting hulls
  Of ancient vessels sunk in days of yore,
While whitened bones and ghastly, grinning skulls
  A silent vigil keep forevermore.
The scene now changes, from the ocean bed
  The waters disappear, and in their place
A stately, marble palace rears its head,
  The relic of a long-forgotten race.
Out of the buried centuries it shines,
  The glamor of the past in every part;
Beauty and grace adorn its phantom lines
  To form a masterpiece of ancient art.
Its gleaming marble walls and lofty towers
  Now fade and merge into a woodland green,
With vine-clad trees and banks of gorgeous flowers
  That deck the grassy spaces in between.
Beneath the spreading shelter of the trees,
  The woodland spirits gather one by one,
Their filmy garments waving in the breeze,
  Their white forms flashing in the golden sun.
From far and near they come, a merry band,
  With flowing tresses and with wings outspread,
And dance a mystic measure hand in hand
  While dazzling sunbeams fall from overhead.
As o'er the sod in ecstasy they glide,
  Like white-capped ocean waves they rise and fall,
Floating among the flowers in circles wide,
  Soaring aloft above the tree-tops tall.
Then, as they sink to earth, a cloud of gray
  Enfolds the forest in a somber cloak;
The scene grows dim and slowly fades away
  Into the air, on trailing wisps of smoke.

The Weird Pipes of Pan Sounded In

THE DESERTED GARDEN

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

MR. JERYM WARING'S archeological researches had brought him at last to the Gower coast of Wales. He stood now in the center of the highway that ran through the unnamed hamlet that he had reached with the aid of kind tourists. In one hand he held a suit-case; in the other the clipping that had brought him there. He looked askance at the headline—"Dead Man in Mysterious Deserted Garden"—and hoped fervently that any prying investigators would have completed their work. The article went on to say that a tourist had been found dead in a strange, out-of-the-way garden overlooking the sea, and that his death was supposed to have been by murder, though it was rather late to ascertain definitely, the body having gone long undiscovered. There were curious marks about the throat, it seemed, and the intrepid detective in charge of the case insisted on murder. This, instead of contributing to the clarity of the matter, tangled it still more. Mr. Jerym Waring had a penchant for anything that suggested the ancient; consequently, when he read the last paragraph of the article, telling about the antiquity of the garden, he lost no time in making for the place. Unfortunately he lost himself, and arrived seven days later than he had scheduled.

Mr. Jerym Waring looked up from the article to find himself the cynosure of several pairs of eyes. Two of them were directed at him from behind a curtain to his left; another came from a large frame dwelling on the other side of the road. Mr. Waring fixed his eyes on this building, reflecting to himself that it suspiciously resembled a hostelry. The eyes abruptly vanished, and a moment later a large, rotund man ambled casually out of the building and planted himself against the door-jamb. The archeologist took hold of his suit-case and went over to him.

"I say, brother," he began, "can you tell me where I can find some place to put up for a week or a fortnight?" He shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

The rotund man slowly removed a pipe from his mouth, made a little bow, and answered him, with a far-away look in his eyes, as if he were watching for sailboats along the distant sea-horizon, "You can make yourself right at home here, sir. This has always been as good a hotel as you can find hereabouts." He bowed again, and imperturbably turned to lead the way into the building. Mr. Jerym Waring saw nothing to do but to follow his host.

At table that night Mr. Jerym Waring casually mentioned the mysterious garden. Was it far from there? And could one get to it easily? And how?

"It's a good many steps," said his host, "but it's not what I'd call far." He turned to his wife for corrobora-

tion; she nodded hastily. "The path's pretty clear, now that all those detectives and doctors have worn it down so. You follow it right down to the sea, and there you turn northward and start going up on the cliffs. You'd best be pretty careful there, sir, for the path's narrow as can be, and the sea's below, and there's sharp rock under the water." His wife nodded again, and Mr. Waring nodded, too. The host was using his fork to punctuate his remarks.

THE following morning Mr. Jerym Waring rose especially early and made his way out of his hotel to the sea-coast. It was as yet somewhat misty, and he stood for some moments debating on the advisability of ascending the cliffs in the half light. The path upward seemed fairly clear, but it was also dangerously close to the edge of a sheer wall to the sea. He resolved at last to continue his jaunt, and he made his way carefully up along the cliff wall. At times gulls flew screaming past him, so close that he might have reached out and touched them, had it not been for the danger of upsetting himself. He emerged from the rocky path finally in a sort of ravine, equally as rocky. This he followed to its end, where he came upon the deserted garden.

At first glance it looked like a forlorn cemetery: there were a great many vine-grown rocks and slabs of stone to be seen among the trampled weeds. Here and there were sickly-looking flowers—not at all what Mr. Waring had expected. He walked about among the stones, examining them under his glass, and leaving one after the other with a disappointed air. About half-way through the garden he discovered himself to be in the middle of the ruins of what had once been a stone building. He stood for some minutes looking around him, trying to trace the outlines of this old ruin, when his eye lighted on a peculiar flat slab, close to the wall line of the ruin. It struck him at once as being infinitely older than any of the other stones, and he hurried over to it eagerly.

It was certainly a marker for a grave, reflected Mr. Waring, and he bent closer in a vain effort to decipher the cryptic scrawls on the stone. But the writing was totally strange to Mr. Waring, well versed as he was in ancient lore. Mr. Jerym Waring was chagrined, and he stood up and glanced shamefacedly about, as if on the lookout for anyone who might have seen him. He rambled through the remainder of the garden, but his fancy drew him at last back to the slab. He tried, half-heartedly, to move it, but the effort was futile; the stone was too large, and besides, it was half imbedded in the earth.

It was somewhat after 12 when Mr. Jerym Waring reached his hostelry. The archeologist noticed at once that his host's manner was rather strained, and he wondered vaguely whether this had to do with his presence. At table he mentioned casually his intention to return to the garden for the afternoon. A quick glance passed between his host and hostess, and for a moment after his announcement there was complete silence. Mr. Jerym Waring's host coughed nervously and put his tea-cup in his saucer.

"You'll be back before nightfall, I suppose, sir?"

"That depends," said Mr. Waring reflectively, "on what I find. I have a flashlight with me; so don't worry if I fail to come back for lunch."

"We'd like to have you with us for lunch, Mr. Waring. All afternoon, in fact. You needn't go up there today—you've all week to visit, sir."

"There's never a time like the present. Besides, there may be nothing there after all; so that I may leave you tonight. If I waited and found nothing, I should lose that much time."

"I don't like to mention it, sir, but that garden is a bad spot—an unhealthful spot at night."

"There's a queer slab up there. It has a lot of curious carvings on it," Mr. Waring went on, as if he had not heard his host.

His hostess suddenly set her cup of tea on the table, and moved her chair slightly away.

"It was beside that stone," said his host slowly, "that the body was found."

"Is that so? Well, that's most interesting. I wonder, now. . . . How old do you take the garden to be?"

"I don't know, sir. That garden was there before this town was founded. Some say it's Roman."

"Do you know what night this is?" asked his hostess suddenly. Mr. Waring stared blankly at her. "May Eve, sir. And for years past there've been queer doings up in that garden on May Eve, to say nothing of All Souls and All Hallows."

"What do you mean—'queer doings'?"

"Lights, greenish-blue lights," his host broke in. "And often weird, uncanny music that scares you."

"And no one ever investigated?" asked Mr. Waring incredulously.

"Yes. One of us went up." There was a significant silence. "He never came back; we never found his body." His host coughed again. "But we heard him in the night, screaming."

"What do you suppose——?" begain Mr. Waring.

"There is," said his host stolidly, "it is said, an old god named Pan—a Greek god—of good and of evil, of nature. On May Eve, on All Hallows, on All Souls, the evil predominates, and it is better for man to avoid the spot Pan and his satyrs frequent."

Mr. Waring made an effort to speak, but he said nothing. The eyes of his hostess were staring blankly into the past; her face had gone a pasty white.

Mr. Jerym Waring was somewhat perplexed. But in the afternoon he went up, and by evening he had quite forgotten about the matter.

HE LEARNED nothing from the slab, save that it might have been moved. Had it not been for this discovery, Mr. Waring would have returned to his hostelry in time for lunch. As the matter stood, his lingering was pardonable. His first reaction on sight of the disturbed ground about the base of the slab was one of intense surprize. It was clear to him that it would take more than one man to move the slab, and it was fairly certain that not more than one man at a time had been up here, save perhaps the detectives who had investigated the death some weeks before. Yes, that was most probably it. But it did not seem to him that the stone had been disturbed at all that morning.

Mr. Jerym Waring stood up, relieved. The discovery had been made at sundown, and when the archeologist rose from his crouching position there was only a deep red fringe on the horizon to show where the sun had been. A gull wheeled about high up in the sky, and another followed it, screaming raucously. Mr. Waring stood for a tentative moment. All was strangely silent, with that curious silence that falls in still places when the birds have ceased their crying. It was getting rapidly darker, and all that was left of the day was a faint, darkening line of red on the sea, as if someone were dying there, and bleeding from a hundred wounds. A dim moon was making its way slowly through great clouds of fog rolling up from the lowlands.

Mr. Waring stood there until the fog had entirely surrounded the peak he surmounted; it was as if he had suddenly been thrust out into the far reaches of the sky; as if the earth were thousands and thousands of miles below him.

He turned to go at last, even while

the wisps of vapor were curling around him. He sought out the slab once more, and directed his flashlight at it. He had not anticipated what he saw: the slab had been raised fully an inch from the ground, and it stood on one edge at a distinct angle. Mr. Waring had a sudden, unaccountable vision of his hostess' drawn face. Then his flashlight went out. He stood quite still for a moment; then he ran forward—and fell over a stone. He picked himself up, bewildered, and ran again, only to fall a second time. Again he stood still, and looked in vague fright toward the place where the slab should be.

The fog was too thick to see anything, but the archeologist was not unaware of the faint greenish luminosity that hovered in the vapor near him. He had yet to assure himself of its reality, and he knew of no way to go about it. He was frightened, though he could not himself tell why. Within him stirred indistinct fears, and he felt in the air about him a power, as of a strong charge of electrical current released close by. He anticipated something, though he could not say what.

For some minutes nothing whatever happened, and he was just about to make a tentative step forward, when suddenly, in his immediate propinquity, sounded a succession of weird notes, as if from a group of flutes or willow pipes—sounds as of some diabolic *Danse Macabre*. At almost the same instant a brilliant flash of green light came into being before his eyes, and in its midst he saw a curious, swirling outline, suggestive of a face framed in curling black hair, crowned by a pair of odd upright structures, as of horns. From pipes that the weird creature held at its lips came awful music. Mr. Waring was chilled. He felt in some unaccountable manner that this thing before him was not destined for human eyes, and he wondered if he, too, were seen. The greenish light spread and undulated as he watched, and beyond it he could see hundreds of little black figures dancing.

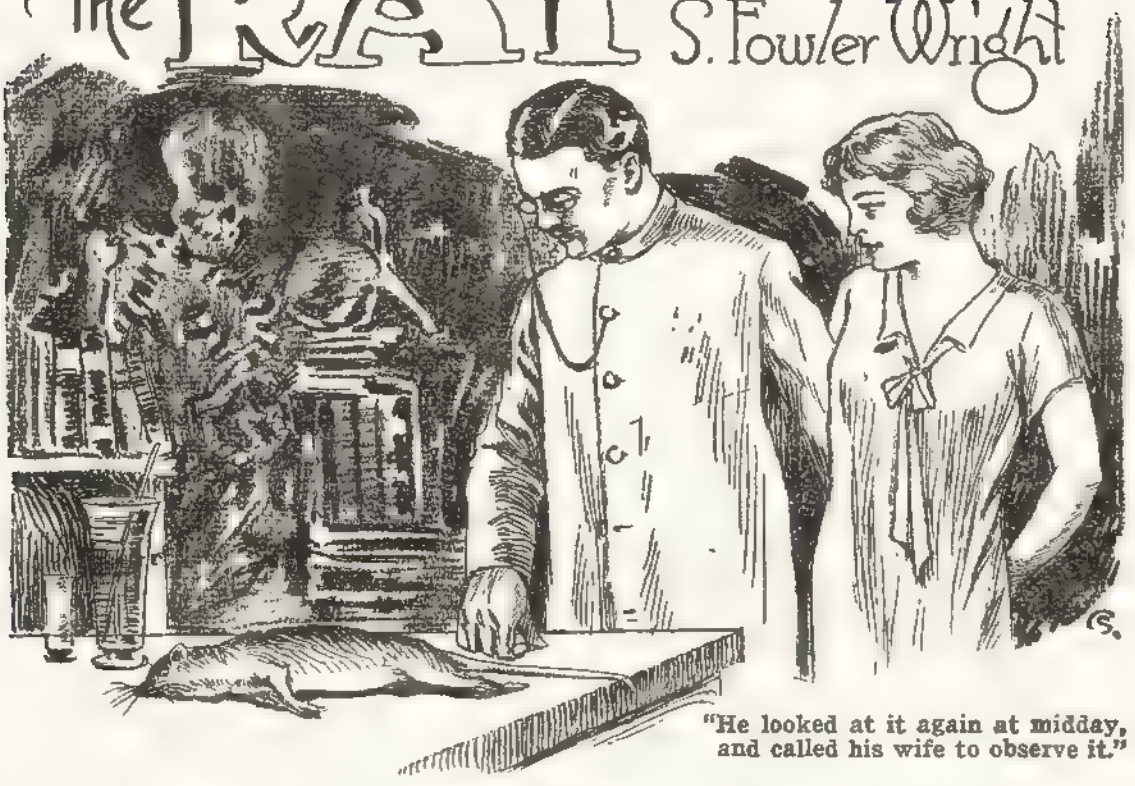
But suddenly Mr. Waring became acutely conscious of the music that the creature was playing on the pipes. From pianissimo it rose sharply to crescendo after crescendo in a succession of piercing notes that came to Mr. Waring as sharp stabs inflicted. For a moment he had no knowledge of what was passing; even while he strove to reassert himself, he felt the music drawing him, and looking around him in his terror, he saw the vague outlines of the trees writhe and twist to the notes. The last thing he saw was a hawthorn bush, whose great white flowers were limned on his consciousness like dead things. Then he felt within him a searching and prodding, as if the strains of that melancholy, weird music had gained entrance to his body, and were now seeking for something to which to ally themselves. And then, finally, a terrific withdrawal. He collapsed, striking his head against the slab as he fell.

MR. WARING'S host found his body at about noon on the following day. He came at the head of an exploring party, organized for the express purpose of discovering Mr. Waring's whereabouts. The archeologist was lying close to the slab, and it was assumed by many that he had slipped and fallen, striking his head on the slab, thus mortally injuring himself. Mr. Waring's host said nothing. He interested himself mainly in the disposal of the body, but he did not fail to note the hundreds of minute hoofprints in evidence on the grass.

Then, too, quite close to the dead man's hand, almost hidden by a clump of grass and an overhanging hawthorn bush, lay a brown, discolored group of willow pipes.

The RAT

By S. Fowler Wright



"He looked at it again at midday, and called his wife to observe it."

DR. MERSON looked at the dying rat, and decided that, should he delay his experiment longer, it would be dead before morning.

He had nursed it now for nearly six months, and it had been very old and blind and feeble when he had bought it.

He had told Briggs that he would give him £5 for the oldest rat in Belsham, and the rat-catcher had earned his money.

It had surprized him, when he had first approached the subject, to realize how difficult it would be to find an animal that was really old and feeble. He had to observe that nature does not encourage the prolongation of pain and weariness: when health goes, life very quickly follows.

But he knew that, in the course of their age-long warfare with the human race, the rats had arrived at some social organization, and had adopted some of our practises, and in particular, that when a disease of blindness (to which they are very liable) attacks them, they may be nursed and fed by members of their family, so that life is prolonged to an age which would otherwise be impossible.

So he had asked for an aged rat, and had watched its vitality recede, till now it was too weak to crawl toward the tempting food that was offered. . . . It was so dull with age that it did not flinch when the needle pricked it.

2

THE next morning it was not dead. It lay sleeping; old, and blind, and decrepit. It was not pleasant to look at, but it may have been less feeble than the night before—and the food had been eaten.

Dr. Merson, observing this, became aware that his heart was beating fast, with a sudden excitement, of which

he had not supposed himself to be capable.

When he looked at it again at midday, and observed that it was feebly attending to a neglected toilet, he did a thing which was less wise than his usual custom, calling his wife to observe it.

Mrs. Merson disliked his experiments; and his own habit of professional reticence disinclined him from speech which had no immediate purpose. But this was a discovery of such momentous consequence that he was impelled to share it.

"You mean that no one need ever die?" she asked incredulously. She was not greatly impressed, even if she took it with any seriousness. She was a healthy young woman, utterly without imagination, and the cook had given notice an hour ago.

"Yes, it might mean that — or nearly—unless by accident. . . . You see," he continued, to an auditor who scarcely heard him, "it isn't really new. We've known for a long time that youth would continue if the cells of which the body is built could have the right stimuli, but it's been difficult to find what they are. Some of the lower forms of life never die, as it is. The old ones break apart, and each part acquires a new impulse of growth from the shock of that division. But in the higher animals there is a change in the substance or activities of the cells as the years pass, the nature of which has been difficult to ascertain, though its results have been evident. . . ."

He stopped, as he became aware that Mrs. Merson had ceased to listen. She regarded the sleeping rat with disfavor.

"I shouldn't think anything wants to live when it's that old," she said, with decision. She had the impatience of healthy youth for all signs of decrepitude. They seemed stupid.

She heard the voice of the butcher at the back door, and her mind reverted to matters of greater urgency. She went back to the kitchen.

3

THE rat improved very slowly. Its appetite increased. It moved more briskly. It gained weight. It gave more attention to its toilet. It became wilder, and more alert to the sounds around it. Finally, its sight returned.

The process was not rapid, but continuous. At the end of three months from when it had received the injection (which had not been repeated), it showed the bodily activity and physique of a young rat.

Dr. Merson did not mention it again to his wife, nor did he seek another confidant. He became thoughtful, and, at times, appeared to be suffering from acute depression. His patients complained, and his practise suffered.

The fact is that he was beginning to fear the consequences of his discovery.

At first, it had seemed simple—and stupendous. He was about to benefit his race as no man had done before him. Had he not found a way by which death itself was defeated? He saw that it would change the whole face of the earth. Old age would become an obscene tradition. Disease would be powerless to overcome the new vitality which he had discovered. Men would no longer die as their minds approached the threshold of wisdom.

He thought of his own patients. There was Mrs. Corner, who would be dead of tuberculosis within a year, unless he should use his new power for her rescue—Minnie Corner, with three young children, fighting her hopeless battle, always "a little better today" when he called to watch the slow, relentless progress of a disease that he could not conquer. He would be very glad to give her health. Having it in his power, it was a clear and simple duty, as her doctor, to do it. But (so far as he could suppose) he

would do more than that. He would give her an approximation to immortality. Not absolute immortality. Her body would still be liable to be damaged or destroyed by violence. Certainly, it would have no power to survive the planet on which it lived. It would be liable to drowning, or suffocation. But it would no longer be in subjection to the treachery of time. Fed, and guarded from violence, it would not age nor decay. There was something odd in imagining Minnie Corner immortal. But there was nothing repellent. He supposed it would mean treating her children in the same way. They would be annoyed if they observed themselves growing old and feeble, while their mother remained young. It would confuse the relationship. Neither would she thank him for such a tableau. He knew Mrs. Corner well enough to realize that there would be no rest for him till he had conferred the same boon upon her household that he should give to her. Well, why not?

About two of the children there would be no difficulty. But he disliked Peter. He disliked Peter intensely. He could not endure the thought of an immortal Peter. It wasn't the clubfoot, though it did seem a pity that it should become an abiding feature of a world grown static: it was certain qualities of meanness and cruelty which the boy had shown from infancy, which his mother had lamented, but which she had been powerless to influence.

According to the law of nature which now prevailed, Peter would grow old, and in due course he would die, and his unpleasant characteristics would perish with him. He might have children, but these children would be different from himself, whether better or worse, and, in due course, they would have still different children, the race repeating itself with an unending variety.

Somehow, this seemed a better prospect than that of an enduring Peter.

Yet he could not imagine an arrangement being smoothly made by which Peter would be consigned to an exceptional mortality. However carefully his moral and physical inferiorities, and the importance of his early elimination, might be explained to him, Dr. Merson felt sure that he would resent it furiously. He imagined a violent assault upon his own person by an adult and desperate Peter to whom he was refusing the boon of immortality. Even a murderous assault. . . .

His mind was diverted to observe that murder would become a more serious crime than it now is—the risk of being murdered a more dreadful possibility. Indeed, all physical risks would be taken at an almost infinitely greater price, and — presumably — with a corresponding reluctance.

It was a relief to abandon these speculations to the task of lancing a boil on the neck of the landlord of the *Spotted Cow*.

4

The weeks went on, and the rat continued, and even increased its youthful vigor. Its eyes were bright. Its coat was smooth and glossy. Its movements were lithe and swift. It was fierce, and watchful for a chance of biting. Once its teeth met in the sleeve of Dr. Merson's coat, and the incident led him to wonder whether its new vitality could be communicated by the medium of a bite. He was aware that the thought gave him a sensation of a peril escaped, and he realized that he was already regarding his discovery with apprehension rather than pleasure. Certainly, he had no wish to have its benefits thrust upon him before he had deliberated more fully on their ultimate consequences.

Also, the rat was disconcertingly watchful for a chance of escaping

from its confinement. Once it actually got its head through the closing door, and it needed a sharp blow to induce it to abandon the hope of freedom. Dr. Merson had an actual nightmare as the result of imagining that if had escaped, and that his invention was destroyed or forgotten, so that the world would pass at last to the dominion of a continually increasing army of immortal rats.

5

After that incident, Dr. Merson became more careful to lock the door of the laboratory in which the rat was confined, and to keep the key in his pocket. Considering the possibilities which might follow should it be accidentally let loose, he realized how little he yet knew of the nature of his discovery. He could not even say whether the vitality it conferred would be passed on to succeeding generations. He imagined some prolific and noxious insect inoculated to immortality, and still exercising a blind fecundity. It might become uncontrollable, and destroy everything before it. That would be a weird ending to created life on this abortive planet, which must already be a joke to all surrounding intelligences.

Yet the idea was more than remotely possible. He imagined his discovery made public, and its advantages become the common property of mankind, and then some super-criminal threatening his race with the results of such an inoculation of some hostile vermin, unless they should do his pleasure eternally.

Day by day his mind renewed its efforts to probe the consequences of his discovery, and retired bewildered, as it encountered some new problem, or some obvious result which he had not previously contemplated.

He saw that the human race would become static. Not in brain, perhaps; but, at least, in body. That alone must make profound differences, produce profound cleavages. The ugly and deformed must remain so to all eternity, perhaps with an increased vitality: but vitality would not alter structure.

There might be an agitation to eliminate the obviously unfit in brain or body, and to replace them with healthier children. But who would decide? Would those who were judged inferior be content to be sacrificed? He imagined fierce and ruthless wars of extermination. Suppose, again, that the white races should attempt to confine his discovery to their own use. He imagined the black and yellow races attacking them with a mad ferocity, to force the priceless secret from them. Would the white race yield, or would they risk their potentially immortal bodies in such a conflict? If they should yield, would not the latent animosities of race and race still remain, to break out into wars which, under such conditions, must result in servitude or extermination?

He saw that, in the absence of widespread war, the world would soon reach a maximum population, and that children must cease . . . or, perhaps, an occasional child might be permitted to replace an accidental death . . . or a large number of children to replace the wastage of war. Would the race remain capable of these occasional fertilities? Or would it arrive at a position at which its numbers would be reduced (however slowly) by occasional misadventures, and these reductions would be irreplaceable?

Or if children should remain a potential possibility, would not the desire for them become at times irresistible with at least many of the unoccupied women? Might they not welcome a war which would throw upon them the duty of replacement?

He was roused from these visions by the consciousness that he was at Mrs. Empsey's bedside.

It was some years since Mrs. Empsey had walked across her bedroom

floor. Her daughter, Ada, waited on her without complaint, and earned a little money by sewing and taking care of the neighbors' children. It was many years since Joe Horton had asked for any rent for the cottage. They had a few shillings weekly from the parish. So they lived.

Dr. Merson had not sent in a bill for ten years past. He never thought of doing so. He had fought as hard for Mrs. Empsey's life as for that of his wealthiest patient. It was all in the day's work.

But he had not been able to cure her. Indeed, he had not hoped to do so. Even now, he was not certain that her damaged interior could be reconstructed, though he could give her a new vitality. But he hoped, even for that. Anyway, she would be about again, and Ada could marry the booking-clerk at Belsham station, who had courted her long enough. They were both over thirty. Here was one of the first places to which his discovery would bring a joy almost beyond imagination. Mrs. Empsey had always clung to life with a desperate cowardice. But even here he would do nothing—would say nothing—too hastily. The whole prospect was so stupendous.

He checked himself in writing a prescription which would have placed his patient beyond the power of any drug to revive her. . . . That was another thought. . . . The power of poisons would continue. . . . If the certainty of death were removed, would the dread of such contingencies be increased until life would become an intolerable care to avoid them? Only experience could resolve that problem.

6

Out of much confusion, a thought came in the end, clearly born out of chaos. If he were right that his discovery could give perpetual youth to mankind, it could only mean that a limited number of people would live long, where, otherwise, a larger number of people would have lived for a shorter time. Putting aside all theories of a future life, all the speculations or dogmatisms of religion, its only result could be to make the single life longer, and the individual lives less numerous. Finally, therefore, it could only be advantageous if it resulted in higher and happier conditions of life than those which were prevailing around him. It would abolish children. It would abolish age. It would make youth perpetual. Youth was the desire of all men. Those who were young desired to retain it. Those who were old would give anything they had to recover it. So much was clear—if he were only sure. Aiming to abolish age, might it not be found—and perhaps too late—that it was youth that had left the world?

By all outward evidences, the rat had regained its youth. Why should he doubt that it was the perpetuity of youth which he would offer to a grateful world? Perhaps he vexed himself because his own mind was too small to understand the greatness of his own discovery.

Yet, could youth be perpetual? Youth was not only of the body, it was of the spirit. He did not know . . . As a doctor, he was predisposed to consider the physical as dominant. But the freshness of youth——?

He considered another possibility. Perhaps age would come, though more gradually, as the spirit tired. Then the body might be periodically inoculated to a new youth, as he had done to the rat, with all the joy of a returning springtime. "If youth but knew!" How many men had wasted youth, and longed for its return in vain, when they had gained the experience which would have valued it more highly, and used it differently! To unite the experience of age with youth's vitality! . . . and then he saw his delusion . . . the joy of

youth is not of experience, but of inexperience. It is because the adventure is new: the path untrodden.

He considered himself. He did not feel old. He was forty-three. He knew that he must appear old to the young people around him. If he were unmarried, and should he ask a young girl to share his life, she might make it a jest to her companions.

But he had a good constitution, and he had lived temperately. His body was still strong and vigorous. Yet he had not the outlook of youth. He realized that his youth would not return, though twenty years should be taken from the age of his body.

With a sudden clarity he realized that, to regain his youth, it was not so much a new body which would be needed; that which he had would serve his purpose well enough, could it only throw off the appearances of thinning hair and growing corpulence, which disguised it from the youth around it; it was a new youth of the soul, an intervening Lethe, which would be needed. . . . He had made no discovery in that direction. Physically, youth might continue, but, as the millenniums passed—even the centuries . . .

7

He made efforts to regain the standpoint of his own youth, that he might explore its differences. He became absent-minded in reminiscence. . . . He used to write poetry then. He had not done anything quite so foolish for many years. All the same, he had done it rather well. The only weak point was that the poems were usually left unfinished. It was so much easier to get the first lines. The memories of youth moved him to the old impulse. With a sudden keen recovery of emotion he remembered his first meeting with Molly . . . the picnic under the trees . . . the first shy kiss on her shoulder. . . . That was before he had gone to college. . . . He had always been loyal to her, and she to him. . . . He was not of the shallower sort of those that change lightly. . . . He loved her now as he had loved her then—but oh! the world between. . . .

I can not stand where once I stood. It takes a life to learn
That none may steer his course to shear the trail of light astern.

That was well expressed. He would have written those lines down twenty years ago. He would have intended to make them into a complete poem. But he knew better now. He knew that they would never be finished. He knew so much—about himself, and others. He even knew his own weaknesses.

That was the trouble. The inexperience of youth was something which could never be recovered, and the experience of age was no substitute. He realized that to abolish age is to abolish youth also.

Seeing this, his mind startled itself with a further possibility—might it be equally true to say that to abolish death would be to abolish life? In a moment's vision he saw life and death in a conflict from which each wins recurrent victory: he saw them interdependent, and this strife as the condition on which they both existed. . . .

8

He imagined his discovery applied to the vegetable world; an oak tree in perpetual vigor. . . . Would there be no place left for fruit-time and harvest? For the young growths of spring? There was the question of food—corn must still be grown for food, and mown down in due season—or perhaps there might be developed roots of a continuing vigor? But the question of food was not merely a human one. All life grew by feeding upon the life around it.

This was fundamental. It had an aspect of cruel rapacity, seeming in-

consistent with the idea of a beneficent God. Yet if there be mortality at all, there can be no better end to the outworn or defeated body than to support the vigor of a new life. . . . His mind stooped, bewildered once again before the stupendous nature of the change which his discovery must bring to the earth's economy.

Perhaps the question was too great for one man to face. Would it not be well to announce his discovery, and for some small committee of selected men to consider whether it should be used? . . . But he knew that there would be no such question in the minds of men. They might doubt its advantages for other men, for alien races, for animal or vegetable creations, but for themselves there would be no doubt at all.

It was true that he might withhold the discovery itself, and merely announce that he possessed it, but even that announcement (if it were believed) might rouse an excitement that he could not estimate. . . . He imagined himself mobbed, beaten, even tortured, till he should consent to reveal it to a frantic world. . . .

Pacing the laboratory restlessly, distracted with such thoughts as these, afraid to meet the reproaches of his wife, who could not understand why he was changed and aging so rapidly, so that he had acquired a habit of remaining there till it should be time to go out on his daily round, he regarded the rat, now running up the bars of his cage in a restless and tireless activity, with sudden hatred. He would kill the loathsome thing, and forget the horror he had discovered. Perhaps he might enjoy life once again. . . .

He looked at his watch, and was startled to see that it was half an hour after the usual time at which he set out on his daily round—and he had a consultation with Sir William Brett at 10:30. He went out hurriedly.

3

SCHOOL was just commencing that morning when Peter Corner left it. He owed his freedom to his ability to take unscrupulous advantage of the caprice of circumstance, and the credulity of his fellows. His two sisters had colds, and his mother had kept them at home. Had he reported to his schoolmistress that his mother suspected measles he would have incurred the risk of ultimate retribution, which he was always adroit to avoid. Instead of that, he made the remark to Jessie Phipson, who could be relied upon to report it promptly. Challenged on the point, he strenuously denied the truth of the suggestion. His mother had never said so. He had told Jessie that they had not got measles *nor* scarlet fever. The mistress did not know what to believe, and sent him home till she could obtain more reliable information. He had expected that.

His expression was almost good-tempered as he dragged his clubfoot toward Dr. Merson's surgery. His sisters usually called for his mother's medicine, but as they had not come to school today the duty fell to him. He did not like going there. He hated Dr. Merson. He hated his eyes, which seemed to see through him without effort, and then to look elsewhere, as though he were not worth seeing. But he had to go today, and he had a hopeful idea this morning. He did not expect to get the medicine before noon. He knew that the doctor was not at home during the mornings. But he could not be blamed for calling on his way home.

He found the surgery door unlocked, as it was sometimes left when Dr. Merson was absent. He had expected that. He knew when and whether most of the doors in Belsham were locked or open. He did not often make use of this knowledge. His physical deformity, and the practical

difficulties of secreting or disposing of illicit gains, had withheld him from active dishonesties. But in his waking dreams (for he had them, as much as more attractive children) he was most often a cat burglar of superhuman audacities.

Had he rung the surgery bell, the maid would have come, or the doctor's wife, but he turned the handle without haste or hesitation, and stood quietly inside, in an attitude of respectful waiting, till he was reassured by the surrounding silence. Then he passed through to the passage. He could not move very quietly, but a sound of crockery in the distant kitchen reassured him, and—beyond his hopes—the key was in the door on the other side of the passage.

Dr. Merson did not often experiment with living animals, but it was generally known that he held a vivisection certificate. It was the dream of Peter's life to enter that room, and view the horrors which he vaguely imagined to be concealed behind the frosted glass that could be seen sideways from the road, if you forced your face sufficiently far between the palings.

Now the door was not even locked, though the key was in it. Peter opened it quietly, entered, and closed it behind him.

10

DR. MERSON had not gone far when he was vexed by a doubt as to whether he had locked the door. He was almost sure that he had—yes, he was quite sure—but he felt vaguely uneasy. He felt for the key in its usual pocket, but it was not there. He felt in his other pockets, with the same result. He must have left it in the door. He felt sure now that he had turned the key, but not removed it. That was what had made his mind uneasy. Really, it didn't matter. No one of his household would enter the room under such circumstances. Certainly Molly wouldn't. She hated the room, and never entered it except to seek him. More certainly still, the maid would not venture. She would not enter to dust it. Not that he wanted her to. Women are a curse where a man works. But he knew her feeling. It was, in fact, her talk in the village which was mainly responsible for the fact that Peter Corner was now inside it. But Dr. Merson didn't know that. He only thought that if the women of his household found the door locked and the key outside they would know that he couldn't be in, and would be unlikely to enter. But was he sure he had locked it?

Probably he wouldn't have turned back, being so late already, had he not discovered, to his added annoyance, that he had left behind some clinical notes which he should require at the consultation for which he was late already.

He went back hastily. On the way, he made a resolution that he would kill the rat that night, and destroy the serum he had invented. He perceived, with a sudden clarity, that the world's Creator might understand His job better than a local practitioner in Belsham village.

The relief that the decision gave him confirmed its wisdom. He was in better spirits than he had been for many weeks as he passed through the surgery, and crossed the passage to the room beyond.

* * * * * * * *

Sir William Brett waited for over half an hour at the house of the patient for the benefit of whose health, and relief of whose pocket, the consultation had been arranged. Then he rang up Dr. Merson's house for an explanation. He received a reply (after some delay) that the doctor had been seized with a sudden indisposition, and greatly regretted that the appointment must be deferred until the following day.

11

THE inquest on the body of Peter Corner had been twice adjourned by a coroner who had known Dr. Merson sufficiently well to regard it as incredible that he should have committed a crime so strange and so inexplicable. He hoped that the doctor might be found, and that his voluntary return would furnish some satisfactory explanation. But the police had not been retarded by any similar hesitation. Within twenty-four hours of the doctor's disappearance the dismembered body of Peter Corner had been discovered, and the facts that the doctor could not be found, and that he had drawn nearly four hundred pounds (practically the whole of his available balance) from his bank in Treasury notes on the previous day, had enabled them to obtain a warrant for his arrest without difficulty.

But the warrant had not been executed.

Dr. Merson had walked to the station quite openly. He had chatted with casual acquaintances on the platform. He had even got into a compartment containing others who knew him. He had traveled to London, saying that he was in search of certain surgical instruments which he required to renew, and had disappeared absolutely.

It was agreed that he had been in particularly good spirits. Indeed — and this was one of the minor mysteries of the case—there had been a noticeable change in his demeanor from the morning when Peter had been seen to enter the door of his surgery. Everyone had noticed the change. It was as though a load of fear or trouble had been suddenly lifted from him.

Mrs. Merson—who had insisted on giving evidence, in spite of the coroner's warning—had confirmed this. She had entered the witness box to urge her conviction, against the weight of overwhelming evidence, that he had not murdered Peter at all, and to assert that he had himself been living in dread of some mysterious enemy, who must be responsible both for the fate of Peter, and for her husband's disappearance.

Her evidence, given with the convincing simplicity of an unimaginative mind, had impressed its hearers with her sincerity, and increased the sympathy with which she was regarded, but it could not shake the weight of evidence which placed the crime upon the shoulders of the absent doctor.

It was admitted by the police that the doctor could not have known that Peter would be released from school on the fatal morning, but their theory was that he had met the boy by chance in the street, and had recognized an unexpected opportunity for the commission of a crime which had been designed within his mind previously. He had told the boy to go to the surgery, and await his return. He had followed immediately, by a different route, entering the surgery unobserved, and promptly disposed of his unsuspecting victim. His household admitted that they had not known that he was at home till the telephone enquiry from Sir William Brett had caused them to seek him, and he had then replied through a half-opened door, that he was unwell, and the appointment must be deferred to the following day.

He had callously proceeded to the dissection of his victim's body, and it was only when the police had traced the missing boy to his own door, and the enquiries had become too close and pointed for his comfort, that he had decided that it would be best to bolt, without delaying for the added risk of attempting the destruction or removal of the dismembered corpse.

Such was the theory of the police, and while it failed to offer the explanation of any adequate motive for a deed so ghastly, and a risk so great, and while there was nothing in the

doctor's previous record to support the suggestion of criminality at once so gross and so reckless, yet it had the advantage of meeting the admitted facts more plausibly than appeared otherwise possible, and even those who were least willing to believe that the doctor could have been guilty of such a murder were unable to put forward any reasonable supposition which could explain the presence of the boy's remains on his premises, and his subsequent flight and silence.

12

It was now two months since Dr. Merson had alighted at Paddington, and been seen to make a leisurely descent of the stairs to the Underground station which adjoins that terminus. Doubtless, the police would continue their enquiries, and the public would continue to keep them occupied with abortive "clues", but the coroner could see no reason for adjourning the inquest further, nor means of avoiding the obvious verdict which the jury would be expected to render. It would place him under the painful necessity of issuing a warrant against an old friend, of whose guilt his own mind was not easily convinced, but that would be of no practical importance, in view of the magistrate's warrant, on which the police were already acting. (The time had not arrived at which this duplication of procedure was reformed in practise).

He had no further evidence to bring forward, except that of Sir Lionel Tipshift, the Home Office expert, who had conducted the post-mortem on the dismembered body, and would give his opinion upon the cause of death with the air of Olympic impartiality on which the police had relied so often for the hanging of suspected persons.

The coroner's court was small, and crowded. It was a rainy day, and the atmosphere within it was one of depression, and of damp umbrellas. The room was plainly furnished with a table for the legal profession, an armchair for the coroner, a partitioned corner for the jury, and some benches for the use of the waiting witnesses, and the general public. It was clean, and its windows were wide and high. Yet it had an aspect of invincible grime, as though it were washed incessantly and vainly to remove an ingrained dirt, against which no physical assault could be directed successfully.

Mrs. Merson sat on the front bench, looking grave, but not acutely miserable. Her husband's cousin, Mr. Reginald Merson, sat beside her. This gentleman, of whose existence she had not known previously, had arrived from the Argentine about six weeks after Dr. Merson had disappeared. He had made a casual call upon a cousin whom he had not seen for over twenty years, and finding himself in the midst of circumstances so strange and tragic, and having time at his disposal, he had offered such help as he could give to his cousin's wife by remaining until the inquest should be over. He had declined her invitation to reside in the house, preferring to take a room at the *Spotted Cow*, but this discretion had not prevented some unkindly gossip, which had attributed Mrs. Merson's equanimity to the very opportune companionship which he was able to offer.

On this point gossip was not entirely wrong, but the emotions of the doctor's wife, being beyond her own analysis, were not likely to be understood by the observations of strangers. She had not wavered in her loyalty to her absent husband, nor had her affection lessened. She held a matter-of-course opinion that he had not murdered anyone; she was quite sure that he was not dead; and she was equally sure that he would return at his own time, and deal with the situation with his usual efficiency. The whole trouble was the work of some

enmity, as to the nature of which, as was natural in the case of one who was destitute of normal imagination, her imaginations were very wild indeed.

Mr. Reginald Merson attracted and sometimes bewildered her by a likeness, not so much to her husband as she had last seen him, as to that which he had been at the time of their engagement, and during the first years of her married life. His voice, though stronger in tone, was curiously similar: his hair, though abundant, whereas her husband had become partially bald, was of the same color and quality—or, perhaps, very slightly darker. His features were alike, except for the short hair on the upper lip, and even that was a reminder of how her husband once had worn it. He was slow and guarded in speech, but, even so, he would let fall remarks at times which showed a puzzling familiarity with the past events of the household.

She did not disguise from herself that his presence gave her confidence, though there was mystery even in that, for he never spoke with any conviction of the doctor's innocence, nor suggested that he might return and vindicate his reputation, and any plans he might casually indicate for her future appeared to assume that the doctor's disappearance was to be accepted as final.

Inspector Clawson, who was in charge of the case, had not overlooked the strangeness of the arrival of this young man, and his curiosity had been increased when he had failed to trace the name of Merson on the passenger lists of any recently arriving liners. He did not see how Mr. Reginald Merson could be associated with the crime, in the absence of any evidence that he had been in the neighborhood when it was committed, but he felt that he was a source from which valuable information might be obtained, that he might very probably be aware of the place in which the doctor was hiding, and might very possibly be induced to speak, if the penalties which are incurred by an accessory after the fact were judiciously indicated.

He had him watched, and discovered nothing. He appeared to have no acquaintances, except Mrs. Merson. He wrote no letters. He received none. The inspector decided to interview him.

Mr. Reginald received him genially. He alluded to the murder at once, and condoned with him on his failure to make any arrest. The position seemed to amuse him. The inspector could not see the joke, and did not like the tone he adopted. He asserted, with a confidence that he did not feel, that he expected that an arrest would soon be made. "Scotland Yard," he lied with the boldness of exasperation, "always gets its man in the end."

Mr. Reginald suggested humorously that he might himself be the doctor in disguise. Would the inspector like to arrest him? The inspector would have liked to do so very well, had a sufficient pretext arisen. He had already considered the possibility which was now suggested in an obvious mockery. The appearance of this mysterious cousin, at such a time, and of so vague an origin, would have attracted the notice of the dullest detective of fiction, and Inspector Clawson was a very capable officer.

But his judgment was too sound to lead him into an error so obvious. He knew how much may be done by disguise, and he knew its limitations. He had never seen Dr. Merson, but he had examined some recent photographs. He knew his age. He had discussed his appearance with local members of the force, who had seen him daily.

Between the suddenly disappearing doctor and the suddenly arriving cousin there were more than the usual cousinly resemblances. But the differences were beyond the possibilities of disguise or explanation. A bald

man can not disguise himself with a thick crop of natural hair. A man of a growing rotundity can not disguise himself in a few weeks by the production of a slim and obviously youthful figure. A man of forty-five can not disguise himself into an appearance of half his age which will deceive the hostile eyes of a detective who is standing two feet away in the open street, when the morning is sunny.

Inspector Clawson only remarked that it was a fine day.

13

That was yesterday. In the coroner's court this morning the inspector's eyes were still drawn in the same direction. He was not greatly interested in the evidence of Sir Lionel Tipshift. For one reason, he knew what it was to be, and for another, he had no respect for the expert witness. He is useful to impress juries, but the police and lawyers knew that another can always be procured to contradict him. Sir Lionel Tipshift was a tame expert, regularly hired by the Crown. The nature of his evidence could be relied upon as certainly as that a prosecuting counsel would not point out the probable innocence of the prisoner against whom his brief was drawn.

So the inspector's attention wandered when Sir Lionel, with a manner suggesting that he was slightly bored by his own infallibility, gave the result of his post-mortem examination.

The body, he assured the court, had been disjointed after death — probably several hours later—by someone with considerable knowledge of anatomy. The internal organs had been preserved, and (with some technical qualifications) were healthy. There was no trace of poison. There were marks of violence upon the body, including certain bruises on the legs, which must have been caused before death, by some blunt instrument. (That was correct. They had been inflicted by Bunny Simpson's foot in the school playground on the afternoon before Peter's existence had abruptly terminated.)

The listeners were hypnotized by the coldly decisive voice to the belief that additional and important evidence had been given. The coroner only, being accustomed to analyze evidence, was conscious that nothing had been added to that which was already known, or could have been reasonably deduced from admitted circumstances, and he was about to address a final word to the jury, when Mr. Reginald Merson rose, and asked, in a deferential but self-possessed manner, if, as the nearest male relative of the absent doctor, whose reputation was so much concerned, the unfortunate death having taken place on his premises, he might ask Sir Lionel Tipshift a few questions upon the evidence he had given.

The coroner hesitated. A coroner's enquiry is somewhat less formal than are the proceedings in the criminal courts. Possibly the fact that not all coroners belong to the legal profession (many are doctors) may have produced a less rigid etiquette for preventing oral intercourse of any kind except through the medium of a paid lawyer. But it is not usual for a witness to be examined in such a manner. He was about to say that he would himself put any enquiry which he might approve, if Mr. Merson would let him know what was in his mind, when that gentleman, taking his pause of hesitation for consent, addressed a question to Sir Lionel Tipshift which was sufficiently unexpected to cause him to remain silent to await the answer.

"Can you tell me if any other body was discovered in the laboratory, besides that of Peter Corner?"

Sir Lionel, who had already moved

some paces from the witness stand, turned back, as he answered with a dry precision:

"There were no other human remains. Dr. Merson appears to have been engaged in the dissection of a recently killed rat, on the last occasion on which he occupied the laboratory."

"Does not the fact that he could have been so occupied, at such a time, with the boy's body upon his hands, suggest that there must have been some connection between the two?" Mr. Reginald asked, but the coroner interposed before Sir Lionel could answer.

"If you have any information which may be of assistance to this enquiry, Mr. Merson, I must ask you to take the oath, and offer your evidence in the usual way; it can not be given in the form of suggestions to another witness."

Mr. Merson did not appear either disconcerted or annoyed by this rebuke. He answered easily. He apologized for his ignorance of the correct procedure. He regretted that he was not in a position to accept the coroner's offer. It had only occurred to him—and he submitted the suggestion with diffidence—that the doctor might have suddenly returned, having remembered, after starting out, that he had not locked the room in accordance with his usual practise, and found the boy trespassing within it. Suppose that the rat had been inoculated with some new and dreadful disease, and the boy had interfered with it, and been bitten, so that he would be certain to contract it, and would not only die himself, but might give it to others, would it not become a natural thing—even a duty, however unlawful—to take *any* steps, at whatever personal risk, to prevent such consequences?

The court listened in a tense silence to this unexpected theory, but Sir Lionel, though he had not been addressed, gave a reply which disposed of its probability, the coroner silently allowing his interposition, with the respect which was usually accorded to his name and title.

"The rat was not diseased. It was a remarkably fine specimen. Indeed, it was the finest and healthiest that I have ever seen. There were remarkable signs of vitality in every organ."

"Then, if it were so exceptional in its physical development, might it not have sprung at the boy's throat, when he opened the door of its cage—which would be about at the same level—and inflicted a serious, or even a fatal wound?"

Sir Lionel, who was seldom disinclined to the sound of his own voice, was about to answer, but his opinion on this point will never be known, for this time the coroner interposed too quickly.

"I don't think, Mr. Merson, that anything can be gained by pursuing hypothetical improbabilities. Such explanations, if put forward at all, should have come from Dr. Merson himself, or from some regularly appointed advocate on his behalf. I am not aware that you have any claim to represent him at all, beyond that of an alleged relationship, and even that has not been sworn to. Dr. Merson is absent. He went away voluntarily, leaving the body of this unhappy boy on his premises, at a time when he knew that enquiries were turning in his direction. I am afraid that the jury will draw their own conclusions."

He paused a moment, and then commenced a brief and lucid charge to the jury, from which a verdict of wilful murder against the absent doctor might be confidently expected.

Mr. Reginald Merson turned to the woman beside him, and said something in a low voice, on which she smiled, and rose with him. Evidently they did not propose to wait to hear the verdict given. The ease and confidence of his own demeanor appeared to have infected his companion, and

she passed out somewhat briskly and buoyantly, as one who leaves an unpleasant incident with finality.

As they went down the steps which led to the street, Inspector Clawson touched Mr. Merson's arm, and he turned politely.

"I should just like to ask," said the inspector, "how you came to know that the boy opened the cage."

Mr. Merson appeared amused. "I dreamt it on Monday night, Inspector. I'm rather good at dreams," he added pleasantly.

The inspector's hand was in his pocket. His fingers closed upon the warrant which he was carrying. If only he had the courage to make the arrest to which his instinct urged him! It might make—or break—him. He became aware that Mr. Merson was speaking to him again, and in a voice of banter.

"It's no good, Inspector. You won't get a word more. The voluntary statement's played out. . . . It's no use worrying," he said kindly; "you'd better go home, and forget it."

The inspector felt that the advice was sound, though he did not like it. He thought of his wife and children, and of the comfortable pension which awaits the later years of frequently promoted officers who do not make mistakes which arouse adverse newspaper comment. He turned sadly away.

14

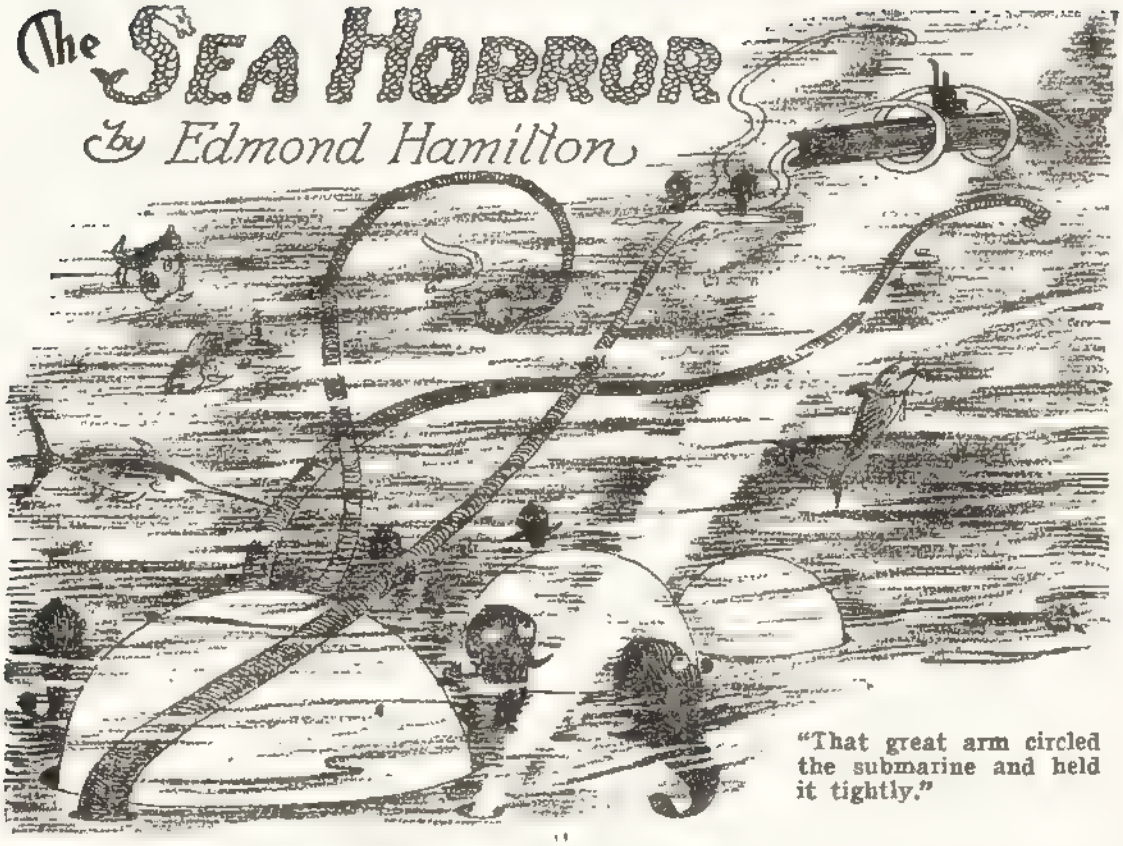
DR. MERSON walked home very happily, beside a wife who did not know him. He was very fond of Molly. He wondered (as he had done before) if the time had come to show her the birthmark on his left arm. He wondered whether it would be expedient to use the hypodermic syringe in his right-hand pocket, which would restore her youth, and give her the vitality which he was already experiencing. He liked her very well as she was, but he did not doubt that he should like her quite as well if she were looking twenty years younger. But he was not quite clear as to the pretext on which he should make the injection. Not quite clear, either, that it would be morally defensible to do it without explaining its results beforehand. He felt that to convince her of the actual truth would not be the easiest of mental enterprises. But he felt also that, if she should be led to share his experiences, she would admit his identity more readily than would be otherwise probable.

Still, there was no hurry. There might even be advantages in delay. He imagined Inspector Clawson studying the metamorphosis of the wife of the missing doctor. It would be amusing. It could hardly be dangerous. Still, it was a needless risk. There was no hurry.

Yes—he would come in to tea.

The Sea Horror

by Edmond Hamilton



"That great arm circled the submarine and held it tightly."

IT IS only now, when we know all the story, that we see at last how narrow was our escape, that we understand at last the power and the dread of that dark horror that rose to whelm an unsuspecting world. From the first sailing of the Clinton expedition to that last flaming hour of tremendous combat when the destiny of a planet was settled forever, we can follow the thing now, and can recognize what vast and unseen forces they were that wove around our world the net of a terrible doom. For it is only now, when the horror has passed over us, that we can understand that horror from its beginning.

It is with Clinton himself that the beginning lies, and with the expedition which bore his name. Dr. Herbert Clinton, holder of the chair of marine zoology at the University of London, was generally conceded to be the foremost expert on deep-sea life in all the British Isles. For a score of years, indeed, his fame had risen steadily as a result of his additions to scientific knowledge. He had been the one to prove first the connection between the absence of ultraviolet rays and the strange phosphorescence of certain forms of bathic life. He had, in his famous Indian Ocean trawlings, established the significance of the quantities of foraminiferal ooze found on the scarps of that sea's bottom. And he it was who had annihilated for all time the long-disputed Kempner-Stoll theory by his brilliant new classification of ascidian forms.

Even to the general public the slender, gray-haired scientist with the keen gray eyes was a well-known figure, for it was his famous investigations into the forms of deep-sea creatures which had made possible the building of the new K-type submarines. These submarines, which had now been adopted by practically all nations, were built upon a new pres-

sure-resistance principle evolved by Dr. Clinton from his investigations, and could venture to depths and pressures impossible to the undersea boats of war and post-war types. Some of them, indeed, had descended to depths of a mile and more without experiencing injury, and it was Clinton's contention that they were in reality capable of depths of three miles and more. To many, at first, that contention seemed only a somewhat boastful exaggeration on his part, but when the announcement of the Clinton expedition made it known that one of these submarines was to be used by that enterprise, the scientist's sincerity was conceded.

It was early in December that the expedition was first announced, by Clinton himself, from the University of London offices. He had long desired, he stated, to investigate the peculiar forms of deep-sea life to be found in the great Nelsen Deeps. These deeps, lying in the Atlantic almost half-way between Ireland and Newfoundland, had been but little explored by oceanographers, due to their great extent and depth, the latter averaging somewhat more than three miles. Trawls used over these great deeps could accomplish but little, but they had brought up some curious variations of common bathic forms, and in one case had brought up an extraordinary portion of a skeleton, or reticulation of bones, that was quite unlike that of any deep-sea form known to zoologists. It was Clinton's hope, therefore, that a more thorough exploration of these great deeps might reveal forms as yet unknown to science, and for such an exploration he planned to use, he announced, one of the new K-type submarines which he himself had helped to design, and one of which had been specially equipped and placed at his disposal by a grateful Admiralty Board.

The submarine provided, the *K-16*, had a cruising radius which made a mother-ship unnecessary, and was large enough to contain all of the necessary trawling apparatus, storage-tanks and laboratories, as well as the expedition's personnel. The members of the latter, it was announced, would be drawn almost entirely from the university's own scientific faculty, including besides Dr. Clinton, Dr. Randall Lewis, an expert on ichthyological and conchological forms; Professor Ernest Stevens, a young instructor of biology and friend of Clinton's; two laboratory technicians from the university's laboratories; and a half-dozen assistants, such as photographers, experienced trawlers, and the like.

It was Clinton's plan to proceed from London directly toward the northern boundary of the Nelsen Deeps, at an approximate latitude of 57° north, and from there work his way down to their lower boundary six hundred miles to the south, making free use of the submarine's trawls, and descending for detailed investigations at any promising spot; since, as he stated, his calculations showed the submarine to be easily capable of reaching the three-mile depth. Besides its regulation torpedo tubes and deck-guns, the *K-16* had been equipped with powerful undersea searchlights capable of dispelling the darkness of the lower depths, while small port-holes of immensely thick reinforced glass had been set in the sides of its control room, as in all the new-type submarines, making a survey of the surrounding waters possible. Communication with the expedition's headquarters at London was assured by its powerful radio apparatus. It was Clinton's hope, therefore, that by making use of all this equipment an extensive and yet thorough exploration of the great deeps could be carried out in a comparatively short time.

Late in April, therefore, the long, glistening steel submarine swept down the Thames and out to the open sea, with the members of the expedition

and two or three of its naval crew grouped on its low-railed deck. At the last moment the expedition's limited personnel had been limited still further by the loss of Ernest Stevens, the young biology instructor who was to have been of it. Young Stevens, on the day before that of sailing, had had the misfortune to twist his ankle badly as he ran down the steps of one of the university buildings, and as the crowded submarine was obviously no place for a disabled man, he was forced to watch it sail without him, contenting himself, during the following days, by following the expedition's progress through the radio reports received from it by the university station.

For the first few days, while the *K-16* crept out of the English Channel and into the broad Atlantic, the messages from it were for the main part but routine reports of progress. The submarine was following a northwestern course toward the upper boundary of the Nelsen Deeps, and would, Clinton reported, begin its surveys at once upon reaching that objective. For several days thereafter the *K-16's* messages to the university station at London gave only its position and progress, and it was not until May 5th that a brief report from the submarine stated that it had reached the desired latitude and was now forging slowly southward on the surface, the expedition's members already busy with their trawls and deck-winches.

For the next three days the messages from the *K-16* were reports of the work accomplished with the trawls. In those days, so Clinton reported, no less than a dozen new forms had already been brought up and classified. An entirely new species of the *Modiola vulgaris* was, he stated, probably the most important of their finds so far, but besides this a half-dozen variations of common malacopterygii and acanthopterygii forms had been obtained and examined. The submarine, Clinton added, was still forging south, working all her trawls, and as yet no descents had been attempted.

On the next day, the 9th, there came a further message in which Clinton reported the bringing up of several other notable variations from classified forms, this time of the dibranchiate and tetrabranchiate cephalopods. He stressed, in this report, the difficulty experienced in using the trawls at the great depths over which the submarine was forging, and added that they had been further hampered by the loss, on the preceding day, of one of their trawls, which, as he said, "was lost in a rather puzzling manner which none of us is able to explain." With this rather ambiguous phrase the message of the 9th concluded, and on the next day no word whatever from the *K-16* was received by the university station. Then, late on the morning of the 11th, there came that short and enigmatic message which was to make Clinton and his expedition the center of a sudden storm of speculation and discussion.

The message itself, received just before noon on the 11th, was a quite coherent one, yet seemed at the same time a quite crazy one. It read:

> Either we are all mad, or we have made the greatest discovery ever made. One of our trawls has brought up a thing so incredible, so unbelievable, that our minds refuse to credit it though it lies before our eyes. I will not expose this expedition to the derision of the world by telling what we have found until we learn more, and for that reason we are making a descent within the next half-hour which will tell us all. When you hear from us again we shall either have made the greatest discovery ever made by men, or shall know ourselves the victims of some incomprehensible delusion.
>
> CLINTON.

Considering that message, it is hardly surprizing that the world found it interesting, and that within the next few hours the newspaper-reading public developed a sudden interest in the

scientific expedition of whose existence it had hardly been aware until then. Through the afternoon of the 11th, in a hundred radio stations on both sides of the Atlantic, press-writers and scientists alike crowded into the little receiving-rooms to wait for the first news from Clinton and his expedition. And in the university station at London, Stevens and Clinton's other friends and associates waited tensely for that news.

Through the long afternoon of that long spring day they waited, and the world waited, but still there came no word. Night fell, but a veil of silence had dropped upon the submarine, and when morning came it found Stevens and his friends still waiting in vain by the silent impersonal instruments. Through all that night the calls of a score of stations to the submarine had gone unheeded, and when the morning newspapers gave to the public the first news of the *K-16's* long silence, they stated openly that some mishap or disaster must have overtaken the submarine. Only young Stevens and his friends remained stedfast in their optimism, and even they began to doubt as the 12th passed and still no message came. By night it was universally believed that the submarine had met disaster, and out on the Atlantic a half-dozen steamers were heading toward the spot where it had last reported its position.

By the morning of the 13th the public was informed through the early editions that the ships rushing to the submarine's aid had been unable to find any trace of it whatever, though they had circled repeatedly over the spot. By that time, too, it was pointed out that the submarine's air-supply would be getting very low, even if it still remained intact beneath the surface. The general opinion, though, by then, was that Clinton in over-confidence had ventured to too great a depth in the submarine, and that it had been crushed by the terrific pressure. Even at the university it was tacitly conceded that this must be the case.

Concerning the strange last message from the *K-16* there was still discussion, but even that was capable of more than one explanation. It was pointed out that Clinton was an ardent zoologist, and that the discovery of some entirely new form might have caused the exaggerated language of his message. Stevens, who knew the calm and precise mentality of his superior rather better than that, would not believe in such an explanation, but was unable to devise a better one to fit that sensational last report. It was the general belief, therefore, that in his excitement over some new discovery Clinton had ordered his submarine to a depth too great, and had met disaster and death there beneath the terrific pressure of the waters. Certainly, whatever its defects, there was no other theory that fitted the known facts so well.

Thus, in a few days, the brief sensation of Clinton and his ill-starred expedition was disposed of. It was useless, of course, to attempt to locate or raise the missing submarine at that terrific depth, and no such suggestion was ever made. Even Stevens and his friends were forced to admit, as the days went by, that there seemed no further thing to be done, nothing by which more might be learned of the hapless expedition's fate. The British and American newspapers combined to advise caution in over-estimating the capacities of the new-type submarines, but except for that, save in scientific circles, the loss of one of the greatest living scientists excited no particular attention. The world deplored the loss, indeed, but turned the moment after to consideration of its own affairs. Certainly, as the days and weeks went by, it never dreamed of the true importance of the strange sensation that had flamed so briefly from the headlines, nor ever guessed the existence of the calm and gigantic plans and forces of which that sensa-

tion was but an incident, and which were rising even then to the destruction of man and all man's world.

2

IT WAS on the fourth day of August, just three months after the passing of Clinton and his expedition, that the first news of the approaching terror was given to the world. That first news was in the form of a dispatch from the government oceanographic station at Portsmouth, in which it was stated that during the last three days the level of the sea had risen almost as many feet. Unnaturally high tides had been lashing the coasts of England and of the world during those days, the message stated, and a study of them had disclosed the astounding and unexplainable rise which had taken place. The dispatch added that the rise was a world-wide and not a local one, since corroborative reports of it had been received from associated oceanographic stations at New York, Yokohama, Sydney and Calcutta.

It is not wonderful that that brief first message aroused in the world of science, and even in the world of everyday, a very intense interest and curiosity. Published as it was in all the London journals on the evening of the fourth, and by them transmitted by wire and wireless to the world at large, it soon eclipsed even the latest atrocious murder as a theme of general discussion. For if there is one thing considered constant in this changing world of ours, it is the level of the sea. All our heights and depths are compared to and computed from it, so unchanging do we esteem it; since though great tides may come and go the level of the sea itself seems never to change, so delicately balanced are the combined processes of evaporation and condensation which deplete and replenish it. And for this hitherto unchanging level to rise suddenly for almost three feet, in as many days, was a phenomenon of intense interest and mystery.

Scientists, indeed, when confronted with accounts of what had taken place, could only shake their heads in somewhat helpless perplexity. No ordinary conditions, of course, could account for such a tremendous and unprecedented rise as this. They ventured the suggestion, though, that some great subterranean upheaval or earthquake might have forced up the bed of the ocean in some spot to such a distance as to heighten the level of the waters. If such an upheaval had taken place in some central spot, they pointed out, such as the Arctic or Antarctic regions, it might well have caused such a great rise as this in the level of all the sea. They were unable, however, to explain the fact that during the last few weeks no such upheaval or quake whatever had been recorded by the seismographs of the world.

Unchecked by any positive knowledge as to the thing's cause, therefore, it could be argued and discussed during the next day or two with zest, and many and fantastic were the explanations that were advanced. The great space devoted to it by the newspapers had aroused the public's fickle interest, and during the next two days the sea and the great tides which were rolling in from it against the coasts of all the world became the center of a world-wide interest. In Sussex and in Anglesey, in Maine and in California, in Korea as in Ceylon, there were everywhere large groups of interested spectators gathered along cliff and sea-wall and beach, to watch those great green tides shattering themselves against the shore, and to speculate idly on the subject of general interest. In England and the Continent, as well as in America, special excursion trains were run to many beaches, and the proprietors of resorts reaped a sudden and unexpected harvest.

It was true that here and there some damage had been done by the rising of the waters, and by the great, unnatural tides, but it was not of a magnitude large enough to arouse attention. A row of bathing-machines wrecked, a road or sea-wall washed away, a beached boat or two swept out to sea—such events as these could hardly seem important to the mass of people in comparison to the strange conditions which had caused them. It was also true that the lot of ships at sea had become suddenly very arduous, due to the great seas running, and that large numbers of the smaller boats had been forced to remain in port until the great tides abated, yet even this made no impression save on that small portion of the world's population which follows the sea. The larger part of the public chose, during those two days, to regard this strange manifestation as a spectacle rather designed for its own entertainment and interest. On the evening of the second day, though, the 6th, there came that which suddenly swept away this attitude.

This was the second calm report from the Portsmouth station, given to the waiting newspapers late on the afternoon of the 6th. Within an hour it had flashed along the telegraph keys and wires, and had fallen into type and was leaping from the presses in London, and in New York, too, and in cities around the whole earth's girdle. And with the publication of that message the whole matter suddenly lost its lighter aspects, and the world that had theorized and laughed and joked concerning it suddenly sobered, and looked up with startled eyes. For the Portsmouth station's second report stated that the rise already noted had not stopped but was apparently still continuing at the same steady and extraordinary rate, having risen some two feet further during the ensuing two days.

"While this extraordinary rise is purely a temporary one, of course," said the report, "it seems advisable that preparations be made for the evacuation of whatever regions or sections lie at a height of less than ten feet above the former standard sea-level." It was this calm advice that sent a sudden chill across the peoples of the earth, so that for the first time there rose the thought of peril in connection with the thing. All during the next day, while the day and night slid around the world in endless alternation, men spoke of the thing with knitted brows and troubled eyes, and in Edinburgh and Chicago and Honolulu and Bombay said to each other, as though with a strange new thought, "If this thing—this rise—keeps on, it's going to be a bad thing, d'ye know?" It was as though that thought had stridden across the world like some giant specter of fear, to still with lifted ghostly hand the laughter which the matter had aroused at first.

But in one spot of earth men neither laughed nor spoke concerning it, but labored madly to stem the peril which they saw rising swift to whelm them and theirs. An observer hanging high over Holland on that fateful 6th would have made out, all along the coasts of that sunken little land, a desperate and unceasing activity, as of the efforts of some swarming insects to repair a breach in their tiny fortifications. For the last few days, indeed, the rising sea had been lashing with all the power of its tremendous tides against the dikes which alone protected the sunken little land from the fury of the ocean. Inch by inch that land had been won from the ocean's power, and walled with the thick dikes which until now had resisted all the ocean's blows; but thick as they were their height was not great, and toward their tops the rising waters had been steadily clawing during the last few days.

As sunset of that day gleamed blood-red in the west the anxious watchers saw that even the parapets of hastily filled sandbags which they

had placed upon their dikes were giving beneath the thunderous tides, and shifting and dissolving. Valiantly they labored, as men will do for their life and land, but before midnight of that night through a score of great breaches the long-repressed seas were rushing in upon the little land in ravening, titanic fury, and church bells were ringing wildly across the countryside and beacon fires blazing red, while roads and canals were choked with hordes of panic-driven fugitives fleeing blindly through the darkness from the terror that leaped upon them from behind. And when at last sunrise gleamed golden over the body-choked waters and over the flooded meadows and spires of cities, word had been flashed to the world that more than half of Holland was under water, its cities buried and populations drowned by the vast, inrushing floods.

With that word the strained anxiety of the world dissolved suddenly into stark fear. It was only the most emphatic messages of reassurance on the part of the newspapers and agencies of public information that prevented a great panic on that morning. They admitted that the disaster had occurred, but pointed out that it had been caused by the breaking of the dikes, as similar disasters had been caused before. No such thing could occur elsewhere, they stated, and assured the public that the rise in the sea's level was only temporary, caused by the subterranean upheaval which had been mentioned by the scientists. Not only would the rise not continue, they predicted, but it would be seen when the measurements were made public that evening that a positive lowering of the waters had taken place.

With such assertions the rising panic of the earth's people was calmed a little on that morning, but the foreboding of dread to come increased as the extra editions poured from the presses that day hour-by-hour chronicles of further disaster. Parts of Lancaster and Norfolk were already flooded, they learned, their inhabitants fleeing by every road to higher ground. Louisiana and the lower valley of the Mississippi were under water, and the basin of the Amazon was a maze of flooded jungles. Fishing villages on the Chinese and Japanese coasts had been swept away with great loss of life by the vast tides of the Pacific, the plantations of lower Malaya had become salt swamps, and along the coastlines of India and Africa the waves were battering the shore with terrific fury. Scores of ships at sea were known to have foundered, sending out despairing calls for help until the last, while others making for the nearest harbor had been caught by the great tides and flung against cliffs and shoals to be pounded into unrecognizable wreckage.

Yet still, through the long hours of that tense day, the authorities and newspapers combined to allay the rising panic. These conditions were but temporary, they repeated, could be but temporary. The sea had risen almost a half-dozen feet during the last few days, due to certain extraordinary conditions, but it would rise no higher, *could* rise no higher. When the report from the oceanographic stations came, that would be seen. Until then they implored the public not to yield to the excitement of alarmists. So through all that day the peoples of England, and of America, and of all the world, remained tensely quiet, waiting, waiting for the word that would either explode their fears or spell their doom. And at last, late that evening, the word they awaited came.

"The extraordinary and unprecedented rise of the sea's level," said the general report issued from the Portsmouth and associated oceanographic stations, "has not subsided during the last twenty-four hours, but

on the contrary has increased approximately a foot more, indicating that this rise, whatever may be its cause, is still continuing at the same rate as when first observed. It is impossible to predict when the rise will cease, knowing as we do nothing of its cause, and it will be also impossible to issue further reports from these stations, since the rise of the waters makes their abandonment necessary. Our only suggestion is that the world's peoples make their way toward the highest grounds near them, since it is clearly evident that within a few more days this continuing rise will result in the flooding of the earth's surface to an unpredictable depth and extent."

That brief, calm message, the last to be sent out by the oceanographic stations, let loose upon the world such a hurricane of panic as it had never known before. We look back, now, upon the night that followed it as one of the most terrible in the history of humanity, a night in which death and fear stalked together across the world like gigantic twin destroyers. For in all the cities of the world, that night, were such scenes, such rushing crowds and shouting men and flaring lights, as no man had ever seen before.

In London the great Thames was already flooding over its embankments into the great basin in which the city lay. The power-plants that lit the great city were failing one by one as the rising waters reached them, section after section snapping into sudden darkness, while away to the west the soaring red flames of a great fire cast a quivering crimson glow across the doomed and drowning metropolis. Beneath that ghastly light, through the swift-running streets, the panic-driven mobs fought and splashed their way toward the nearest hills, toward the open country, toward safety. Crowded automobiles whirled through those streets in blind disregard of those whom they ran down. Ships all along the flooded harbor stood out to sea, preferring rather to face the great waves and mountainous tides than to be smashed helplessly against their moorings. Airplanes high above buzzed unceasingly through the night, to north and south and east, to wherever was higher ground.

And in New York, too, the seas were lapping now against the great buildings that seemed to tower up in splendid disdain of the waters clawing at their bases. There, too, were flooded streets, and rushing, fear-mad mobs, and fierce men with burning eyes who bawled at street corners of the wrath of the Lord and of the returning deluge. Already immense crowds had collected on the heights of the island's northern part, and from there, and from the other heights westward, they watched with awe the sweeping seas that rolled and broke now across the squares and parks and avenues of the proudest city in the world. And by then, too, the populations of Boston, and Philadelphia, and San Francisco and Seattle were fleeing inland by every road, and of New Orleans there remained visible only the roofs of flooded buildings.

Everywhere on earth, in those hours, men were turning away from the coasts, away from the vast, ravening seas that were hurling themselves over the land, and were pushing inland toward higher ground, toward the Alps and the Appalachians, toward the Pyrenees and the Andes, toward the Himalayas and the Rockies. And even as they fled, news was flashing along the last remaining lines of communication of great tidal waves that had wiped away life in the Hawaiian and Philippine Islands, of the waters of the China and Yellow Seas black with the bodies of drowned men, of the fear that had lit India red with the torch of terror, that had prostrated black and howling hordes along flooded African coasts, that had made of a hundred European cities infernos of roaring panic. For through all of earth's five continents, that night, the roads leading inland

were the scene of the stampede of humanity.

Through the darkness of that dread night they went, vast, unorganized mobs that fled blindly on, pushing and striking and trampling, and as they fled the last organizations of men were slipping and crushing, knocked down like children's houses of blocks by the giant hand of fear. It was the flood, the ever-feared deluge of all the legends of men, the horror that was springing upon all the earth. Men prayed and fought and sobbed and killed themselves in their raving fear, that night, but ever the remorseless waters rose higher, and higher, and higher. Up and up they came, slowly, steadily, surely, up toward the annihilation of man and the age-old reign of man, up toward the whelming of a world.

3

YOUNG Ernest Stevens, on that fateful night of the 7th which saw the climax of the world's fear, had found himself in the vicinity of Piccadilly when the first rush of the panic began. He had seen for himself the sudden rise of the waters of the Thames which had taken place during the preceding few days, and had also read the newspaper accounts of the extraordinary and unexplainable heightening of the sea's level, but was still so much centered on the strange passing of Clinton and his expedition as to give the subject of general interest but small attention. On this night, however, when the publication of that epochal last message from the Portsmouth station sent the first crowds hastening through the streets, Stevens realized his own position and started off across the city toward his lodgings.

Before he had gone far the first great mobs were rushing through the streets, beginning the vast exodus from the city, and disrupting all the ordinary means of transportation. Already, too, salt floods were creeping through the streets, adding to the panic of the crowds, and as Stevens walked on, the lights of the city around him were beginning to fail, fanning the flames of fear higher in the already panic-mad crowds. By the time Stevens finally stumbled up the steps of his lodging-house, the street on which it stood was wholly dark, and covered by a few inches of water through which the fugitives along its length were splashing.

He found the house itself deserted, and going to his own rooms quickly gathered the most necessary of his belongings into a small bundle, which he formed into a rough knapsack or pack. This done he turned toward the door, then paused a moment at the window. Before him stretched away the roofs and steeples of the vast city, all their sparkling lights vanished now and darkened. From the west, though, came a flickering red light, and he could see there a mighty uprush of flames. The street outside, the waters in it slowly rising, was alive with hurrying figures, many with great bundles or barrows, all pressing on to escape from the city, and shouting hoarsely to one another.

Stevens turned toward the door, but as he did so he stopped suddenly short. The door had swung open, and in its opening stood a man, a dark, slender figure. The red glow of light from the window fell full upon his face, and as Stevens saw it he cried out.

"Clinton!" he cried. "Good God! —Clinton!"

The other came swiftly toward him, and grasped his arm. "I thought I might find you here, Stevens," he said, quietly. "It was a thousand-to-one chance, but I came."

Stevens stumbled with him to the red-lit window, like a man in a dream. "Clinton!" he exclaimed again. "Where in God's name have you been, while this horror has been rising on the world? When did you come back?"

Clinton pushed him back into the chair by the window, and silenced his questions with an upraised hand. "I came back but a few hours ago, Stevens," he said, "and I came here for you because I sail again in an hour, and want you with me."

"Sail?" repeated Stevens, stupefied. "To where?"

"To the bottom of the Atlantic," said Clinton, calmly.

As the younger man stared at him he dropped into a chair beside him. "To the bottom of the Atlantic," he repeated, his voice suddenly pregnant with dread knowledge, "where I have been for weeks, where there is a secret which I first of all men discovered, where the work of untold ages is whirling now to its climax and sending this mighty flood rolling out to drown our world!"

He was silent a moment, gazing out over the red-lit city while Stevens stared at him in stunned amazement, and then went on. "You were to have been of our expedition, Stevens, and you know what my plans were. You know how we sailed in our submarine to penetrate the deeps that had never yet been penetrated by man. Out of the English Channel, out into the open Atlantic we sailed, west and northwest, until we had reached at last the northern boundary of the Nelsen Deeps. And there our work began.

"I need not tell you of that work, for our own radio reports recorded the main features of it. We headed slowly southward, on the surface, using our trawls, and during the next three days we were amazed at the richness of the fields beneath us, the profusion of new forms and variations of old ones that our trawls brought up. It was late on the fourth day that we lost one of our trawls, as I reported. We drew up the steel cable, to find that it had been severed near its end, and though we were certain, of course, that it had broken when the trawl caught on a snag, it was no ragged break but a clean, sharp cut, as though done by giant shears. That it was which touched us first with a sense of mystery and awe. Around us was only the vast empty panorama of sea and sky, but beneath us were three miles and more of lightless waters, a vast gulf unpenetrated since the world's birth by man or the science of man. We worked on, southward, feeling as though under some strange spell. And then, shattering that spell, came the thing which one of our trawls brought up on the morning of the fifth day, the 11th.

"It was not so much *in* the trawl as *on* it, hanging from a corner as though caught and brought up by the ascending trawl. It was a machine, or part of a machine, a thing of shining metal about a foot in each dimension. There was a framework of heavy metal rods, three of them; inside were a chain of little gears and six slender tubes of what seemed glass, with inside of each a red wire or thread. The framework's three thick pillars were broken off sharp at the bottom, as though the thing had been ripped by the trawl from some larger machine, yet in itself the thing was a complete mystery. It was totally unlike anything we had ever seen, the shining metal was a wholly unfamiliar one, and the glasslike tubes, we found, were not glass but a transparent metal of some sort. The thing was constructed, too, with a strength and heaviness unusual in so small a mechanism. No one on earth would construct it thus heavily; but suppose it had been actually constructed at the sea's bottom from whence we had dragged it, to resist the tremendous pressures there? What mysteries could be lurking in the three miles of water below us?

"There was but one thing to do, to descend in the submarine for further exploration, and after sending off a last message in which I hinted of our discovery, without telling more lest the whole thing prove a hoax, we began excited preparations for the

descent. The deck-fittings were dismantled, the heavy conning-tower doors clanged shut, and a moment later the submarine's electric motors began to hum and we slanted downward into the green waters, using both ballast-tanks and diving-planes for our descent, and moving downward in a great spiral.

"GAZING through the little port-holes in the control room, Dr. Lewis, Captain Evans, the submarine's commander, and I watched the sunlit waters outside darkening as we sank downward. In those waters there turned and flashed the shoals of surface fishes, but as we dropped on, these disappeared, giving way to other forms that we could but vaguely make out in the darkening waters. By the time the bathometric dial registered five hundred feet the darkness about us was all but absolute, and a word of command turned on the great under-sea searchlights, from which long lanes of golden light cut out through the gloom about us.

"Still down we sank, in that great spiral course, until we had reached a thousand feet, two thousand, a mile, a mile and a half. Now and then we glimpsed great sea-creatures that blundered into the glow of our lights, cephalopods and gasteropods, and now and then one of the larger deep-sea crustaceans. Most of these, however, seemed to flee from the brilliance of our lights, though in one case we caught sight of a long, snaky form that could only have belonged to the hydrophis family, though it was of unprecedented thickness and length.

"The dial now registered a two-mile depth, and we snapped off the submarine's lights, for in the waters about us were glowing the phosphorescent creatures that lurk in these great depths. Floating by in the darkness went here and there a *Brisinga elegans,* or luminous star-fish, its nineteen long tentacles glowing with misty light. The snakelike stomias boa flashed past, the double rows of luminous disks on the sides of its long body adding to the phosphorescent brilliance. We made out, too, a squat, flat creature fully fifteen feet in length, with great fanged mouth and luminous tail and fins, quite unknown to the science of zoology, while scores of the rare *malacosteus niger,* with its two headspots of greenish-gold light, could be seen around us. Then, as we sank still farther downward, the glowing phosphorescent forms about us thinned and vanished, while about us lay a dark and almost lifeless region of waters.

"I turned to order the lights snapped on again, but stopped short at a sudden cry from Lewis, at the port-hole beside me. He could not speak, only pointing down in utmost excitement through the glass, and as I too gazed down, awe and astonishment fell on me. For glimmering up toward us from far below, through the dark waters, was a faint white light, a strange, cold radiance that was growing rapidly stronger as we dropped down toward it. In stunned silence we watched, as our craft dipped down, and now at last we began to see its source.

"A thousand feet below us there stretched an unimaginable scene. It was the ocean's floor, a level, somewhat rolling plain, and on it, within this vast region of white radiance, were grouped scores, hundreds, thousands of strange structures, great globes of shining metal, pierced by doorways, which were of uniform size, each being fully three hundred feet in diameter. They were ranged in long streets or avenues with mathematical precision. Away into the distance as far as the eye could reach stretched this mighty city of globes, and I saw that on the top of each globe was a small squat mechanism, like that which our trawl had

brought up but larger, and while these mechanisms were not themselves luminous or shining, there sprang from them in some way rays of white light which made it plain that it was these which produced the strange white light that bathed all this gigantic city.

"Our craft was slanting downward, toward and across the city as we watched in awe, and as it did so we made out two things. The first was that far away there was a spot at the city's heart where were no globes, a vast, smooth-walled pit that seemed to sink down into the sea's floor for an unguessable distance, and which I judged was fully two miles in diameter. Near its edge there soared up above the globes of the city, for fully two thousand feet, a slender tower of the same shining metal, at whose tip was a small, bulb-like room. I seemed to see, also, vague, great shapes that moved about this tower, but at that moment my attention was shifted suddenly by Lewis' exclamation to the city beneath us, and I saw for the first time the people of that city.

"Through the streets, but a few hundred feet below us, now, there moved countless numbers of black forms, creeping along the smooth, metal-paved avenues like great black slugs. And as we dropped closer toward them we saw that that was what they were—great slug-people, their bodies thick cylinders of dark flesh, perhaps eight feet in length and three in thickness, on which they crawled forward like giant worm-things, their only limbs two short, thick flippers near the head, their only sense-organs that we could see being two great, dark, shining eyes like the eyes of an octopus—great slug-creatures, inhabitants of the waters here at the sea's bottom, crawling through this strange and awful city whose existence men have never dreamed—a city at the bottom of the sea, a city glowing with white, unearthly radiance, a city peopled by unhuman creatures, but reared into being by more than human power!

"We stared down upon it, in indescribable awe and wonder, and then Evans, the commander, uttered a sudden exclamation. A group of the strange slug-creatures had collected in the street just below us, gazing up through the waters toward us with their strange, dark eyes, and now we saw that across the city toward us was striding an erect, gigantic shape. It came from the direction of the great pit and tower, where there could be glimpsed others like it—an erect, vast shape of metal, striding toward us on two mighty limbs or columns which must have measured a thousand feet in height, and which supported at their top a small disk-platform on which were grouped two or three of the slug-creatures, operating their vast mechanism. From below this platform, too, there projected a great jointed limb, or arm, of almost the same length as the two great legs, and as the vast thing strode toward us over the city of globes this mighty arm was reaching out toward our craft.

"I uttered a shout, and heard a hoarse order from Evans shouted through the speaking-tube, and a moment later the submarine shot upward with all the power of its motors. But as it did so there came a jarring shock and clash of metal, and then our craft was pulled downward, its propellers spinning in vain. The great upraised arm of the giant striding machine had gripped us and held us as a child might hold a toy.

"Now, with that great arm circling the submarine and holding it tightly, the vast mechanism began to stride back across the city, and a moment later had halted, and was lowering our craft to the city's floor. Below us, we saw, was a group of three of the globe-buildings set apart

from the others in a small clearing, and before one of these the arm that held our craft placed it, still holding it tightly. We saw the great door of the globe-building, fifty feet across and twice that in height, opening by sliding down into the metal pavement below. Ten feet inside was another similar door which was opening likewise, both great doors being quite transparent, though apparently of immense strength. In a moment our craft had been pushed inside, into the bare, white-lit interior of the great metal globe, and then both great doors rolled back up and closed tightly. Our submarine, with all in it, was prisoned in the waters inside.

"The next moment, though, there came the throb of great pumps, and swiftly the waters inside the globe began to sink, while a strange hissing began. A glance at the dials explained it, for as the waters sank they were being replaced by air, at a pressure the same as at sea-level. In a moment more the waters had disappeared entirely, and cautiously we opened the conning-tower doors and stepped out. The air, we found, was quite pure and breathable, though with a strange odor of chemicals, and had it not been for the vast white-lit city of globes lying beneath the waters outside our transparent doors, one might have thought himself in some room on earth's surface.

"I knew, though, as the submarine's startled occupants stepped out into our strange prison, how far we were from earth's surface, how unfathomably far from the life of humanity in this city of the sea's dark depths, this white-lit town of the trackless ocean's floor. For I knew now how far from humanity were these strange and fearful slug-creatures who were of more than human intelligence, but with no human point of view, who could capture men and put them in this prison of air at the sea's bottom as we of earth would capture some creatures of the sea and imprison them in a prison of water, or aquarium, on earth!

4

"We were not long left undisturbed in our strange prison. Within a few minutes we saw, approaching our building from outside along the smooth-paved street, a group of the slug-creatures who carried with them what seemed strange suits of flexible metal, with transparent eye-holes. Three of them donned these, fastening them carefully, and then the outer door of our prison rolled down and the three moved or crawled into the vestibule, or space between the doors, which was filled with water, of course. A moment later came the throbbing of pumps again, the vestibule emptied of water and filled with air, and as the inner door rolled down in turn the three crawled into our prison. Their armored suits, we saw, were filled with water to enable them to venture into the unfamiliar element of air, just as a human diver in an air-filled suit will venture into water.

"A moment we humans stared at these strange figures, in sickened horror, while those outside watched us carefully through the clear door, ready to open it and send the destroying floods in upon us at any wrong move on our part. Then one of the three, with a long, slender rod in his grasp, moved to the metal wall of our prison and drew a sketch, or diagram, of sea and land, with slug-like creatures at the sea's bottom and erect, manlike ones upon the land. He pointed from the former to himself, and from the latter to us, and I stepped forward and repeated his gesture to show our understanding.

"With this beginning he worked on, with other sketches and diagrams, establishing a slender line of communication between us, while

those of our party watched in fascinated horror. At the end of an hour or more of this the things left us, through the vestibule-chamber, leaving us all in a strange state of wonder and fear. There was but little conversation on the part of any of us, and though we examined our prison carefully there seemed no chance whatever for escape; so the hours that followed passed in a semi-lassitude and silence, broken only by a sketchy meal from our own stores, after which most of our party resigned themselves to sleep. The air, we noted, remained quite pure, and was apparently made artificially by these creatures in some way, and pumped to us from outside.

"The next day passed in the same way, and the next, and the next, strange nightless and dawnless days, eternally lit by the perpetual white radiance, which followed one another like the time-periods of a dream. In those days, however, the creatures who were our captors persisted in endeavoring to establish communication with us, for their own purposes, and gradually Lewis and I attained to an exchange of ideas with them. Their purpose, we found, was to question us concerning the world above, particularly concerning our nations and cities and their relation to the sea. We did not understand the purpose of those questions, then, but bit by bit during that exchange of ideas we came to learn something of their own history and plans, and began at last to understand what terrible peril was hanging above our world.

"These creatures, as we had guessed, were native to the sea as man is native to the land, developed from the lower forms of sea creatures in the remote past just as man developed from the lower land ones. Life began in the sea, as you know, and these slug-beings had developed into intelligence and power while man was still a half-ape roaming the barren plains. They had built their great globe-cities at the sea's bottom, and for their greater convenience had lit them with the light-producing mechanisms on the globes, which set up a permanent excitation or vibration of the ether, of a frequency that formed perpetual light-vibrations. In their hidden depths they reigned, lords of the sea.

"But their domains were steadily diminishing. You know that since the dawn of time earth's seas have dwindled steadily, following the laws of molecular motion, that slowly those seas have retreated and dwindled, as on every planet they do, as on Mars they did eons ago. And since the slug-people could live only in the terrific pressures of the great depths their own realms were swiftly shrinking. They must either form some plan to halt the dwindling of the seas, or face certain extinction.

"They finally, after long discussion, adopted a stupendous plan, which was none other than to produce artificially such vast quantities of water as would replenish the dwindled seas, would cover all earth miles deep with them and give all earth as the slug-people's domain. They knew, in their science, how to form atoms of any element out of the primal ether itself by raising it to the desired frequency of vibration. Just as they had produced light from the ether they could produce matter, which is but a vibration of the universal ether. Suppose, then, that they set up vast generators to form immense quantities of hydrogen and oxygen atoms, and suppose those tremendous quantities of hydrogen and oxygen were mixed together, with a small proportion of certain chemicals added. The result would be that from the generators immense quantities of sea water would be shot forth to add to the sea's bulk, to cause it to rise until it covered the highest

peaks. They needed only to make generators of sufficient size and number, and at this they set to work.

"They set to work, and for the sake of convenience they built their vast generators under their own cities, which were located in all the great deeps of the sea over earth, in the Atlantic and Pacific and Indian oceans, vast cities with countless hordes of the slug-creatures. Under each of their cities lay one of the titanic generators, with a vast pit opening at the city's center for the waters that would be formed to issue forth from beneath. It was a work of centuries, of ages, this building of the great generators, one beside which the building of the pyramids was but the task of an hour. Man rose to power on earth above them, never suspecting their presence, even, and still in the depths the slug-creatures worked on at their great task, that was to give them all the world.

"At last the great generators, under the cities of the slug-people in all the deeps of the sea, approached completion. It was necessary to provide a single control for all of them, so that all could be turned on at the same moment, since otherwise the inequality of currents might produce too great disturbances of the sea. This control, therefore, was placed in a small room at the top of a great spire at the center of one of their cities in the deeps of the mid-Atlantic, the city which we had discovered and where we were prisoned. And now, as we learned, the great work was almost finished, and soon the generators which had taken ages to build would be put into action. Around the spire which held the control of all the generators there watched always their giant striding-machines, since this little room at the spire's tip held all the energies of all their generators on earth centered inside it, and should it be damaged or wrecked the generators themselves would run wild, resulting in titanic etheric explosions which would inevitably destroy not only all the generators themselves but also the great cities built upon them, and the numberless slug-people of those cities.

"In sick despair we watched the days passing, cooped in our little prison, while the plans of the slug-people came to their climax. Far above us, we knew, were sunlight, and fresh breezes, and ships going to and fro upon the waters, but around us were only the oppressing waters and the white radiance and the city of globes and its unhuman people. And at last the age-old plans of those people were finished, and the great generators were turned on. We saw them flocking through the streets toward the great spire and the vast pit, saw a gleam of sudden green radiance from the control room at the spire's top, in the distance; and then there was a great quivering of the ground and the waters about us, and up from the pit there shot with immense force and speed a vast current of waters, a tremendous solid stream two miles wide and of terrific speed, formed we knew by the combining elements in the vast generator beneath the city, turning each moment millions of tons of water into the seas above us. And we knew, too, that at that moment in all the other cities of the slug-people across all the deeps of the sea, other and similar currents were being shot forth by the titanic generators, adding each moment incalculable amounts to the bulk of the seas.

"Through all that day we watched the great current shooting ceaselessly up through the calmer waters about it, and through the next, and knew that on earth the waters must already be rising inch by inch, and that they would creep up, inch by inch and foot by foot, until they had covered all earth's fields and forests

and cities and highest peaks, until earth itself was covered miles deep with this sea of hell, and at its bottom the slug-people reigned triumphant. Then, at last, the agony of our despair broke forth, and we seized at once upon a chance for escape which presented itself.

"It was in a suggestion made by Evans, the submarine's commander, that we saw our chance. His plan seemed suicidal, almost, but it was still a chance, so we ignored the risks. Waiting for some hours until the street outside our prison had emptied somewhat of the passing slug-people, we took from the submarine's equipment a long, slender drill of steel, and with this, held and guided by two seamen, set to work on the metal wall of our prison. At first the metal seemed too hard for the drill to affect, but gradually it bit into it, deeper and deeper. Inch by inch it crept on into the thick metal wall, while we watched anxiously. The hours were passing swiftly, and in the distance we could see the mighty current from the pit still roaring upward, but at last, when it seemed that the wall was too thick for us, the drill broke through.

"Before we could withdraw it, it had been knocked inward toward us with terrific force by the pressure of the waters outside, and through the two-inch hole it left came shooting inward a solid stream of water of terrific force. In a moment that jet had filled the great room to a depth of a foot, and hastily we splashed toward our submarine, clambering up and inside it and shutting tightly the heavy doors. From the port-holes we could see the waters in the room swiftly rising, until within a few more minutes they had risen sufficiently to float the submarine, which had been lying on the bare metal floor of the great room.

"Instantly Evans gave an order, and at once the craft's motors began to hum and its reversed propellers to thrash the waters, backing us against the wall opposite the great doors. There we paused a moment, and then another order sent the boat leaping across the great room through the waters like a living thing, toward the inner of the two great doors, which could be opened only from the outside. With a great ramming shock the craft's prow struck the door; for this was our plan, to batter down the two doors if possible and make our escape. The door, we saw, had been shaken by the blow, its thick, transparent metal deeply dented, but it still hung fast; so again the submarine retreated to the opposite wall and again leapt forward to crash against the barrier.

"At the second blow there was a clash of metal against the sides of our craft and we saw that the great door had crumpled beneath the two blows. Only the outer door barred our escape, now, and excitedly we watched as the submarine reversed once more and leapt forward against that last barrier. We struck it with a great jar that again knocked us all from our feet but did not dislodge the door, and now there came a sudden exclamation from Evans as he saw, through the port-hole, a group of the slug-creatures who had stopped outside and were peering in toward us. As our craft leaped forward in another dash against the thick metal we saw them hastening down the street, and a moment later saw striding over the city from the distant spire three of the great machines that guarded that spire, hastening across the city in gigantic strides toward us!

"In spite of our second blow the outer door still hung fast, and swiftly the hastening machines were nearing us. By now the submarine's motors were humming at their highest power, and as Evans hoarsely shouted the order, the craft backed

against the wall, hesitated for a moment, and then leapt forward through the waters toward the outer door for a third time, with all the force of its whirling propellers. As we shot forward I saw, not a thousand feet away, the great machines that were bending down toward our prison, and then there came a great crash and jar, the great metal door was crumpled aside like one of cardboard, and our submarine shot out into the open waters. Swiftly toward us reached the great arm of the foremost giant machine, and for a moment, as we slanted sharply upward, we felt the end of that arm graze against the side of our craft. Then we had torn past it and were shooting up through the waters toward the surface at a steep angle, up until the city of globes and the white radiance that bathed it were lost from view beneath us.

"Up, up, up—until at last our craft shot bodily out of the waters into the sunlight and clean air. Panting and half senseless we ripped the doors open, breathed deep of the salt breezes. The waters on which the submarine floated were running in great seas, and from a hasty consultation of our instruments we saw that already the sea's level had risen several feet, and knew, too, as no others did, what was causing that rise and bringing doom upon the earth. So we set our course back toward England and raced homeward through the rising waters to bring our warning to the world, for in the general panic our radio calls received no answer. East and southeast we held, and at last were sweeping into the harbor of London, where, after a frantic hour, Evans, Lewis and I were able to convince the naval authorities of the truth of our story, were able to convince them that the only remaining chance to prevent the destruction of all our world is to descend into the depths in force and destroy or attempt to destroy the great generator which we saw in action there in the deeps of the Atlantic, and after it the others.

"This was but a few hours ago, Stevens, and in those hours and while I have talked here with you the submarines of all the British fleet, the new-type submersibles which alone can descend into those terrific depths, have been gathered in the flooded Thames and soon will sail, with the submarines of all other countries that can be gathered, to make one last attempt to save our world. I had an hour or more, I knew, so while Lewis hastened away in search of his family, I, who have none, came here in the hope of finding you, Stevens, knowing that you would be with us if you could. And so now you know what terror it is that is flooding our world, that is rising toward the death of all humanity, and toward which, at the bottom of the Atlantic, we sail within the hour, for one final desperate attempt to halt this rising doom."

Clinton rose to his feet with these words, gazed silently out over the red-lit city, over the rising floods that rushed through its streets and sent the fear-crazed fugitives outside shouting down those streets in blind horror. Stevens, too, arose, gazed with him, and then with a common impulse and with no spoken word they had turned toward the door, toward the street. Half an hour later they had won their way across the dark, flooded wilderness that was London toward the rank on rank of long, grim steel hulls that swung by the shores of the swollen Thames, and a few minutes later they stood in the narrow control room of one of those hulls as they swung in formation out to the open sea, more than a hundred strong.

Out, out, they moved, into the darkness of the surging channel, and then southward around the foreland, where there fell in at the side of their

formation a similar formation of an equal number of craft, the combined Atlantic and Mediterranean submarine fleets of France, Germany and Italy. Still the combined fleets moved on, toward the west, through the surging, tremendous waves, in steady, unchanging formation. Onward through the hours of the night they moved, and on into the day, still westward, and through the night again until at last, at dawn, there could be seen on the waters far ahead a multitude of long black spots, long steel hulls like their own, the great American submarine fleet racing eastward in answer to the call for help. The two fleets met, coalesced, and then, in one great triangular formation, more than three hundred strong, turned and headed north. The morning waned, and the afternoon, and sunset came, but still those gathered scores of long grim craft forged north and north, toward the Nelsen Deeps and what lay at their bottom, toward the last great battle of humanity to save its drowning world.

5

STANDING in the submarine's narrow control room, Clinton gazed intently at the dials before him, then out of the port-holes in the wall. "We're there, Stevens," he said, quietly, gesturing toward the little windows through which the great fleet behind could be seen, each of its scores of craft resting motionless on the surface. And now the submarine's commander, Evans, who had been lost and prisoned with Clinton, came toward them.

"Our craft will descend first," he told them, "the others following in close formation. Our plan is to descend to an elevation of a few thousand feet above the city and attempt to cripple or destroy the generator beneath it with our torpedoes and bomb-charges."

While he spoke he had twisted around the signal-lever on the dial before him, and a moment later, in answer to his signal, the boat's electric motors again took up their powerful hum. At the same time it began to move forward through the waters, slanting downward. Stevens had a last glimpse through the port-holes of the sea and sky outside, warmly lit by the sun that blazed above, and then the long green waves were washing up over the glass and over the submarine's conning-tower as it slanted downward, in a great spiral. And soon the green waters outside, alive with shoals of silvery fish, were darkening, changing, as the needle on the bathometer dial crept slowly around.

He looked up suddenly as he glimpsed through the port-holes a dark shape passing above, and then saw that it was but one of the submarines of the fleet above, descending after them and following them, score upon score of long, dark, fishlike hulls, that circled and dipped and sank after them, down toward the fate of a world. Surely in all the record of battles had men never gone toward battle like this, with no shouts or cheers or flying flags or defiant shots, but only the dark, grim shapes that sank gently down and down into the peaceful, darkening depths of the sea.

Down, down, down—a thousand feet the dial registered, and the waters about the submarine had become dark blue, all but lightless, and darkening still more as they steadily dropped lower. There were no lights turned on, nothing to betray their presence, and into a still deeper darkness the great fleet sank, while Clinton and Evans and the seamen in the little room stared from the dials to the dark port-holes with strange, set faces. Great currents had begun to rock and sway the submarine as it dropped on, currents from the mighty generator below, Stevens knew, but still they held to

their downward progress until the bathometric dial showed a depth of a mile — a mile and a half — two miles——

Abruptly Clinton, at the port-holes, made a sudden gesture, and pointed downward. Stevens gazed intently down into the blackness that seemed to press against the glass, and then he uttered a low exclamation. For he could make out, far below, a ghostly white radiance that filtered faintly up toward them through the filmy depths. Stronger and stronger it was growing as they sank down toward it, and he saw Evans turn, give swift orders through the speaking-tube by his side, and heard the clang and clash of metal somewhere in the submarine as its great torpedo and bomb tubes were made ready. In an instant, it seemed, while they dropped downward still, the stillness of the submarine had been replaced by swift activity. And then, cutting abruptly across the sounds of that activity, came a sharp cry from Clinton.

"Those globes!" he cried. "They are coming up! Look!"

But Stevens, too, had seen. Outlined dark against the growing white light beneath them he had glimpsed a dark, round object that was moving steadily and swiftly up toward them from beneath, that moved up with ever-increasing speed like the reversal of some object falling downward. Swiftly it came, and now he could see that it was a black metal globe perhaps a yard in diameter. He felt the submarine swerve sharply as Evans abruptly spun its wheel, glimpsed the uprushing globe grazing past its side, and then the thing had passed above them, and had struck full on the bottom of a submarine just above. There was a flash of intense purple light, flaring out through the waters in blinding intensity, and then the submarine rocked and spun like a leaf in a gale, while the great flash and the craft above which it had enveloped vanished together.

"Bombs!" shouted Clinton. "Bombs of some kind that they release from beneath, to rise and strike us—and look, more——"

Even as he spoke there was rushing up toward them from beneath an immense mass of the round black globes, seeming in that moment to fill the waters about them.

Stevens remembered the next few moments only as a timeless period of flashing action. He felt the submarine dive steeply downward under the hand of its commander, saw through the glass scores of the deadly globes flashing up past them, and then the submarine again was rocked by titanic convulsions of the waters about it as craft after craft of the fleet above them vanished in blinding flashes of the purple light. In those few minutes, he knew, scores of the submarines that followed them had fallen victim to the deadly spheres.

But now the great fleet, diving sharply amid that deadly uprush of globes, was within a few thousand feet of the sea's floor, was slanting down through the white radiance toward the city below, which Stevens saw for the first time. A moment, as the fleet seemed to pause above the city, he saw it all plain—the multitudes of ranked great globular structures, stretching away as far as the eye could see, the dark, slug-like beings that hastened through their streets and squares, the vast pit at the city's center from which arose the mighty, half-glimpsed current of waters, and the towering spire near that pit's edge, the tiny bulbular room at its top a point of green radiance, around which were grouped scores of the vast, thousand-foot striding-machines. Then that one moment of pause was over and the whole great fleet was swooping down upon the city below, releasing a shower of great torpedoes and bombs as it did so.

The next moment there came a hundred flashes of fire beneath them as the torpedoes and depth-charges struck, and then it seemed as though in a score of places beneath them the city was crumbling, disintegrating, beneath the force of the great explosions. The submarine was rocking and swaying perilously from the effect of those explosions, only the super-resistant hulls of the new-type craft enabling them to endure the shock, but even while Stevens heard the men near him shouting hoarsely he was aware that the massed boats were diving again, and again the thunderous detonations below came dully to their ears through the waters about them.

But now he heard a sudden cry of alarm, taken up and repeated by all in the control room. From far away, all around the great city, there were hastening toward the attacking submarines scores of the giant striding-machines, their vast steps whirling them across the city with inconceivable swiftness, the great arm of each outstretched toward the submarines. An order was barked, and the craft's propellers spun swiftly as it headed upward to avoid those reaching, menacing arms, while the whole great fleet headed up also with the same purpose. The next moment, however, a spark of more brilliant white light broke into being in the city below them—a great, erect cylinder, they saw, that was suddenly shining with a dazzling radiance that darkened the white luminosity of the waters about it. And as it broke into being the submarine below seemed suddenly to waver, to halt, and then to be pulled slowly, steadily downward by great unseen hands, toward that shining cylinder.

Stevens heard the motors throbbing in his own craft, its spinning propellers only serving to hold it in the same position, and heard a shout from Evans.

"That cylinder!" he cried. "It's a great magnet of some kind—it's pulling our ships downward!"

For now by dozens, by scores, by hundreds, the fleet's massed ships were being pulled downward, their screws thrashing the waters in vain, pulled down toward that mighty, dazzling beacon of light. The next moment the great striding-machines had reached them, were grasping them, crushing them, whirling them about like toys and hurling them far away to break and smash upon the globes below, spilling forth men and air-bubbles and great clouds of oil. Ever downward, downward, the mighty magnet of light pulled the helpless craft, while Stevens' own craft, highest of them all, could only resist that terrific pull by all the power of its humming motors. And among the helpless craft below he could see the great machines of the slug-people stalking about in terrific destruction, crushing and smashing the defenseless boats as they sought vainly to escape while Stevens' own craft sought frenziedly to win out of the remorseless grip that held it.

But now, below, the doomed submarines seemed suddenly to cease their efforts to escape from the great magnet's grip, and abruptly turned, paused, and then hurtled down with all their own force and that of the attracting magnet toward the giant machines below them whose great arms were destroying them. Stevens cried out hoarsely as he saw torpedo and bomb flash down and send a half-dozen of the great machines reeling and crashing down upon the city in flashes of bursting fire. At the same moment he was aware that their own craft was winning slowly out of the giant grip of the magnet, inch by inch, foot by foot, creeping upward and outward from that grip, while below the last scores of the attacking submarines were meeting their doom, crushed by the arms of the giant machines and annihilated by the purple-flaring bombs that

rushed up toward them from the city below.

And now the great machines were striding toward his own craft, the last remaining one except for a few far across the city that were battling their way upward against others of the machines. Slowly, slowly, the submarine crept upward, while the mighty shapes whirled across the streets and globes of the city toward it. They were below it, now, were reaching up with gigantic arms, and Stevens stared down upon those upward-reaching arms in a strange apathy of despair. The battle was over, he knew, humanity's battle, lost now forever, its last chance flickered out. Up came the whirling arms, up, while still the submarine crept higher, and then one of them had struck it a great, glancing blow, in reaching for it, had knocked all in it to the floor, stunning Evans and his seaman and Stevens himself against the metal walls, and knocking, too, the submarine out of the last limits of the magnet's giant grip.

Its propellers whirling with sudden power, it shot out of that unseen hold, over the city, and Stevens raised his head, stunned and bleeding, to see Clinton standing at the wheel, to hear his wild shout as he sent the submarine racing above the city toward the great pit and the uprushing current at its center, toward the towering spire at that pit's rim, and the round, green-lit little control room at its top. Straight toward that ball-like room at the great spire's tip flashed the racing submarine, and Stevens glimpsed the mighty striding-machines, far across the city, abandoning the battle with the remaining few submarines, which shot sharply upward, to whirl after their own; saw rushing toward them from around the spire others of the giant machines, their vast arms upraised to grasp and crush the hurtling craft. But before they could grasp it, before their great arms could do ought more than graze along its sides, Clinton had sent the submarine flashing past them with a hoarse cry and had crashed it straight into the little room at the mighty tower's tip.

Through the metal walls of that room the hurtling submarine crashed as though through walls of paper, speeding still straight up and outward with the force of its tremendous impetus. To the half-conscious Stevens, crouched there, it seemed that for a single moment the whole world held its breath, and then he saw a fountain of brilliant green fire burst out and upward from the little control room at the great spire's top, felt a mighty, thundering detonation shake the waters about him, and then half glimpsed below him the sea's bottom and the great city upon it heaving, rumpling, breaking and crashing, as that city broke up and was annihilated by a tremendous uprush of dazzling fires from beneath it—broke up and was annihilated, as he knew, by the explosion of the mighty generator beneath it, whose titanic, pent-up energies the wrecking of the little control room had released—broke up and was annihilated, Stevens knew, as *all* the cities of the slug-people had been in that moment, when the mighty generators beneath each of those cities exploded likewise, the prisoned energies of all of them released by the wrecking of the little room from which all had been controlled. In all the far-flung deeps of earth's seas the cities of the slug-people and all their hideous hordes had met annihilation in that tremendous moment, he knew. The earth shuddered and swayed beneath those simultaneous, titanic cataclysms; the sea's whole floor rolled and shook; and then, as the submarine was flung wildly upward by the terrific convulsions of the waters, the vast fiery uprush of destruction beneath faded from his eyes.

Then Stevens felt his senses failing him, sank backward and was but

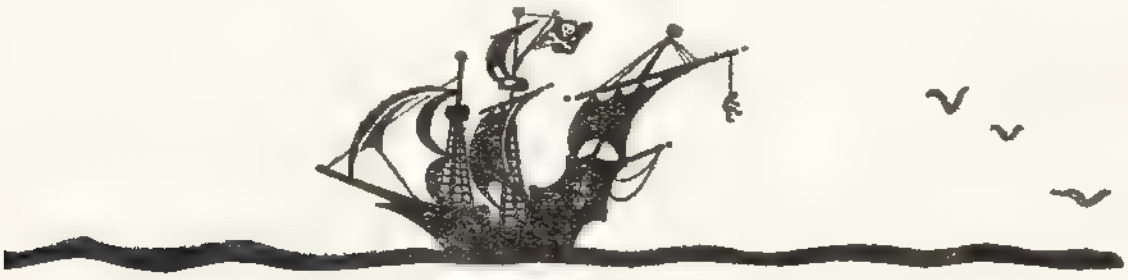
dimly conscious of the waters outside the submarine roaring wildly as it shot upward with terrific speed. For a time that seemed endless to his darkened mind that roaring continued, and then abruptly came silence, and a great shock and splash. Then he felt hands upon him, and hoarse voices shouting in his ears, heard the doors above clanging open, admitting a flood of sunlight and clean fresh air upon him, and then he knew no more.

6

SUNSET was flaming red in the west once more when Clinton and Stevens stood together again on the submarine's narrow deck, watching the preparations for its homeward voyage. Behind it floated a bare dozen of other long steel craft, as scarred and battered as itself, flung up and saved like itself by that last great convulsion of the waters—a dozen only, the last remnant of the mighty fleet of hundreds that had dived to the attack a scant few hours before. Even as they watched, three of those craft were moving away on their own homeward journey, toward the west, toward the sunset, over the waters that were now miraculously calmed and smoothened. Their last rejoicing farewells came faintly over those waters as they went, and then they were passing from sight, dark blots against the brilliance of the western sky, dwindling and vanishing.

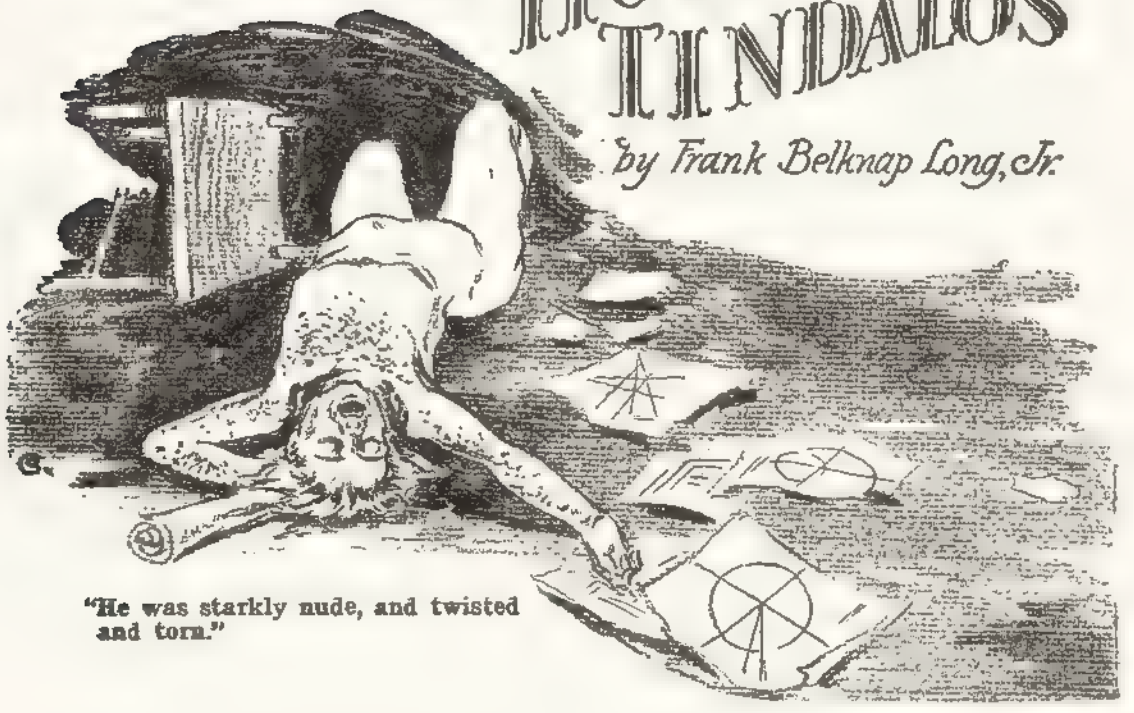
There came into the minds of both men, as they gazed across the peaceful waters, a wonder as to what frantic outbursts of joy were shaking the peoples of earth to see those waters calmed thus, to see their terrible rise thus halted. There came into their minds a vision of what might have been, of the seas that might have whelmed a planet, with a strange and terrible race triumphant and supreme upon it, and then one of what would be, when the hordes of fugitives, half hoping, half doubting, would creep back from their hills and mountains of refuge toward their deserted lands and cities, when the places that were silent now and dead would be ringing again with life, when all the terror that had riven earth would be but a thing of the remembered past.

Then these things slipped from the minds of both and they turned toward the east as their craft, and those behind it, moved away in that direction. Onward through the waters they moved, their propellers turning faster and faster, little waves breaking from either side of their prows as they clove the sea. The brilliance faded from the sky behind the two men, as the little fleet moved on, and the gathering night closed down upon the world, star-embroidered. But the two standing there alone on the little vessel's deck were silent still, and unmoving, gazing out into the darkness across the calm waters with the silence of men whose minds hold things too great for speech.



The HOUNDS of TINDALOS

by Frank Belknap Long, Jr.



"He was starkly nude, and twisted and torn."

"I'M GLAD you came," said Chalmers. He was sitting by the window and his face was very pale. Two tall candles guttered at his elbow and cast a sickly amber light over his long nose and slightly receding chin. Chalmers would have nothing modern about his apartment. He had the soul of a mediæval ascetic, and he preferred illuminated manuscripts to automobiles and leering stone gargoyles to radios and adding-machines.

As I crossed the room to the settee he had cleared for me I glanced at his desk and was surprized to discover that he had been studying the mathematical formulæ of a celebrated contemporary physicist, and that he had covered many sheets of thin yellow paper with curious geometric designs.

"Einstein and John Dee are strange bedfellows," I said as my gaze wandered from his mathematical charts to the sixty or seventy quaint books that comprised his strange little library. Plotinus and Emanuel Moscopulus, St. Thomas Aquinas and Frenicle de Bessy stood elbow to elbow in the somber ebony bookcase, and chairs, table and desk were littered with pamphlets about mediæval sorcery and witchcraft and black magic, and all of the valiant glamorous things that the modern world has repudiated.

Chalmers smiled engagingly, and passed me a Russian cigarette on a curiously carved tray. "We are just discovering now," he said, "that the old alchemists and sorcerers were two-thirds *right*, and that your modern biologist and materialist is nine-tenths *wrong*."

"You have always scoffed at modern science," I said, a little impatiently.

"Only at scientific dogmatism," he replied. "I have always been a rebel, a champion of originality and lost

causes; that is why I have chosen to repudiate the conclusions of contemporary biologists."

"And Einstein?" I asked.

"A priest of transcendental mathematics!" he murmured reverently. "A profound mystic and explorer of the great *suspected.*"

"Then you do not entirely despise science."

"Of course not," he affirmed. "I merely distrust the scientific positivism of the past fifty years, the positivism of Haeckel and Darwin and of Mr. Bertrand Russell. I believe that biology has failed pitifully to explain the mystery of man's origin and destiny."

"Give them time," I retorted.

Chalmers' eyes glowed. "My friend," he murmured, "your pun is sublime. Give them *time*. That is precisely what I would do. But your modern biologist scoffs at time. He has the key but he refuses to use it. What do we know of time, really? Einstein believes that it is relative, that it can be interpreted in terms of space, of *curved* space. But must we stop there? When mathematics fails us can we not advance by—insight?"

"You are treading on dangerous ground," I replied. "That is a pitfall that your true investigator avoids. That is why modern science has advanced so slowly. It accepts nothing that it can not demonstrate. But you——"

"I would take hashish, opium, all manner of drugs. I would emulate the sages of the East. And then perhaps I would apprehend——"

"What?"

"The fourth dimension."

"Theosophical rubbish!"

"Perhaps. But I believe that drugs expand human consciousness. William James agreed with me. And I have discovered a new one."

"A new drug?"

"It was used centuries ago by Chinese alchemists, but it is virtually unknown in the West. Its occult properties are amazing. With its aid and the aid of my mathematical knowledge I believe that I can *go back through time.*"

"I do not understand."

"Time is merely our imperfect perception of a new dimension of space. Time and motion are both illusions. Everything that has existed from the beginning of the world *exists now.* Events that occurred centuries ago on this planet continue to exist in another dimension of space. Events that will occur centuries from now *exist already.* We can not perceive their existence because we can not enter the dimension of space that contains them. Human beings as we know them are merely fractions, infinitesimally small fractions of one enormous whole. Every human being is linked with *all* the life that has preceded him on this planet. All of his ancestors are parts of him. Only time separates him from his forebears, and time is an illusion and does not exist."

"I think I understand," I murmured.

"It will be sufficient for my purpose if you can form a vague idea of what I wish to achieve. I wish to strip from my eyes the veils of illusion that time has thrown over them, and see the *beginning and the end.*"

"And you think this new drug will help you?"

"I am sure that it will. And I want you to help me. I intend to take the drug immediately. I can not wait. I must *see.*" His eyes glittered strangely. "I am going back, back through time."

He rose and strode to the mantel. When he faced me again he was holding a small square box in the palm of his hand. "I have here five pellets of the drug Liao. It was used by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tze, and while under its influence he visioned Tao. Tao is the most mysterious force in the world; it surrounds and pervades all things; it contains the visible universe and everything that we

call reality. He who apprehends the mysteries of Tao sees clearly all that was and will be."

"Rubbish!" I retorted.

"Tao resembles a great animal, recumbent, motionless, containing in its enormous body all the worlds of our universe, the past, the present and the future. We see portions of this great monster through a slit, which we call time. With the aid of this drug I shall enlarge the slit. I shall behold the great figure of life, the great recumbent beast in its entirety."

"And what do you wish me to do?"

"Watch, my friend. Watch and take notes. And if I go back too far you must recall me to reality. You can recall me by shaking me violently. If I appear to be suffering acute physical pain you must recall me at once."

"Chalmers," I said, "I wish you wouldn't make this experiment. You are taking dreadful risks. I don't believe that there is any fourth dimension and I emphatically do not believe in Tao. And I don't approve of your experimenting with unknown drugs."

"I know the properties of this drug," he replied. "I know precisely how it affects the human animal and I know its dangers. The risk does not reside in the drug itself. My only fear is that I may become lost in time. You see, I shall assist the drug. Before I swallow this pellet I shall give my undivided attention to the geometric and algebraic symbols that I have traced on this paper." He raised the mathematical chart that rested on his knee. "I shall prepare my mind for an excursion into time. I shall *approach* the fourth dimension with my conscious mind before I take the drug which will enable me to exercise occult powers of perception. Before I enter the dream world of the Eastern mystics I shall acquire all of the mathematical help that modern science can offer. This mathematical knowledge, this conscious approach to an actual apprehension of the fourth dimension of time will supplement the work of the drug. The drug will open up stupendous new vistas—the mathematical preparation will enable me to grasp them intellectually. I have often grasped the fourth dimension in dreams, emotionally, intuitively, but I have never been able to recall, in waking life, the occult splendors that were momentarily revealed to me.

"But with your aid, I believe that I can recall them. You will take down everything that I say while I am under the influence of the drug. No matter how strange or incoherent my speech may become you will omit nothing. When I awake I may be able to supply the key to whatever is mysterious or incredible. I am not sure that I shall succeed, but if I *do succeed*"—his eyes were strangely luminous—"*time will exist for me no longer!*"

He sat down abruptly. "I shall make the experiment at once. Please stand over there by the window and watch. Have you a fountain pen?"

I nodded gloomily and removed a pale green Waterman from my upper vest pocket.

"And a pad, Frank?"

I groaned and produced a memorandum book. "I emphatically disapprove of this experiment," I muttered. "You're taking a frightful risk."

"Don't be an asinine old woman!" he admonished. "Nothing that you can say will induce me to stop now. I entreat you to remain silent while I study these charts."

He raised the charts and studied them intently. I watched the clock on the mantel as it ticked out the seconds, and a curious dread clutched at my heart so that I choked.

Suddenly the clock stopped ticking, and exactly at that moment Chalmers swallowed the drug.

I ROSE quickly and moved toward him, but his eyes implored me not to interfere. "The clock has stopped,"

he murmured. "The forces that control it approve of my experiment. *Time* stopped, and I swallowed the drug. I pray God that I shall not lose my way."

He closed his eyes and leaned back on the sofa. All of the blood had left his face and he was breathing heavily. It was clear that the drug was acting with extraordinary rapidity.

"It is beginning to get dark," he murmured. "Write that. It is beginning to get dark and the familiar objects in the room are fading out. I can discern them vaguely through my eyelids but they are fading swiftly."

I shook my pen to make the ink come and wrote rapidly in shorthand as he continued to dictate.

"I am leaving the room. The walls are vanishing and I can no longer see any of the familiar objects. Your face, though, is still visible to me. I hope that you are writing. I think that I am about to make a great leap—a leap through space. Or perhaps it is through time that I shall make the leap. I can not tell. Everything is dark, indistinct."

He sat for a while silent, with his head sunk upon his breast. Then suddenly he stiffened and his eyelids fluttered open. "God in heaven!" he cried. "I *see!*"

He was straining forward in his chair, staring at the opposite wall. But I knew that he was looking beyond the wall and that the objects in the room no longer existed for him. "Chalmers," I cried, "Chalmers, shall I wake you?"

"Do not!" he shrieked. "I see *everything*. All of the billions of lives that preceded me on this planet are before me at this moment. I see men of all ages, all races, all colors. They are fighting, killing, building, dancing, singing. They are sitting about rude fires on lonely gray deserts, and flying through the air in monoplanes. They are riding the seas in bark canoes and enormous steamships; they are painting bison and mammoths on the walls of dismal caves and covering huge canvases with queer futuristic designs. I watch the migrations from Atlantis. I watch the migrations from Lemuria. I see the elder races—a strange horde of black dwarfs overwhelming Asia and the Neandertalers with lowered heads and bent knees ranging obscenely across Europe. I watch the Achæans streaming into the Greek islands, and the crude beginnings of Hellenic culture. I am in Athens and Pericles is young. I am standing on the soil of Italy. I assist in the rape of the Sabines; I march with the Imperial Legions. I tremble with awe and wonder as the enormous standards go by and the ground shakes with the tread of the victorious *hastati*. A thousand naked slaves grovel before me as I pass in a litter of gold and ivory drawn by night-black oxen from Thebes, and the flower-girls scream '*Ave Cæsar*' as I nod and smile. I am myself a slave on a Moorish galley. I watch the erection of a great cathedral. Stone by stone it rises, and through months and years I stand and watch each stone as it falls into place. I am burned on a cross head downward in the thyme-scented gardens of Nero, and I watch with amusement and scorn the torturers at work in the chambers of the Inquisition.

"I walk in the holiest sanctuaries; I enter the temples of Venus. I kneel in adoration before the Magna Mater, and I throw coins on the bare knees of the sacred courtezans who sit with veiled faces in the groves of Babylon. I creep into an Elizabethan theater and with the stinking rabble about me I applaud *The Merchant of Venice*. I walk with Dante through the narrow streets of Florence. I meet the young Beatrice and the hem of her garment brushes my sandals as I stare enraptured. I am a priest of Isis, and my magic astounds the nations. Simon Magus kneels before me, imploring my assistance, and Pharaoh trembles

when I approach. In India I talk with the Masters and run screaming from their presence, for their revelations are as salt on wounds that bleed.

"I perceive everything *simultaneously.* I perceive everything from all sides; I am a part of all the teeming billions about me. I exist in all men and all men exist in me. I perceive the whole of human history in a single instant, the past and the present.

"By simply *straining* I can see farther and farther back. Now I am going back through strange curves and angles. Angles and curves multiply about me. I perceive great segments of time through *curves.* There is *curved time,* and *angular time.* The beings that exist in angular time can not enter curved time. It is very strange.

"I am going back and back. Man has disappeared from the earth. Gigantic reptiles crouch beneath enormous palms and swim through the loathly black waters of dismal lakes. Now the reptiles have disappeared. No animals remain upon the land, but beneath the waters, plainly visible to me, dark forms move slowly over the rotting vegetation.

"The forms are becoming simpler and simpler. Now they are single cells. All about me there are angles —strange angles that have no counterparts on the earth. I am desperately afraid.

"There is an abyss of being which man has never fathomed."

I stared. Chalmers had risen to his feet and he was gesticulating helplessly with his arms. "I am passing through *unearthly* angles; I am approaching—oh, the burning horror of it!"

"Chalmers!" I cried. "Do you wish me to interfere?"

He brought his right hand quickly before his face, as though to shut out a vision unspeakable. "Not yet!" he cried; "I will go on. I will see—what—lies—beyond——"

A cold sweat streamed from his forehead and his shoulders jerked spasmodically. "Beyond life there are"—his face grew ashen with terror —"*things* that I can not distinguish. They move slowly through angles. They have no bodies, and they move slowly through outrageous angles."

It was then that I became aware of the odor in the room. It was a pungent, indescribable odor, so nauseous that I could scarcely endure it. I stepped quickly to the window and threw it open. When I returned to Chalmers and looked into his eyes I nearly fainted.

"I think they have scented me!" he shrieked. "They are slowly turning toward me."

He was trembling horribly. For a moment he clawed at the air with his hands. Then his legs gave way beneath him and he fell forward on his face, slobbering and moaning.

I watched him in silence as he dragged himself across the floor. He was no longer a man. His teeth were bared and saliva dripped from the corners of his mouth.

"Chalmers," I cried. "Chalmers, stop it! Stop it, do you hear?"

As if in reply to my appeal he commenced to utter hoarse convulsive sounds which resembled nothing so much as the barking of a dog, and began a sort of hideous writhing in a circle about the room. I bent and seized him by the shoulders. Violently, desperately, I shook him. He turned his head and snapped at my wrist. I was sick with horror, but I dared not release him for fear that he would destroy himself in a paroxysm of rage.

"Chalmers," I muttered, "you must stop that. There is nothing in this room that can harm you. Do you understand?"

I continued to shake and admonish him, and gradually the madness died out of his face. Shivering convulsively, he crumpled into a grotesque heap on the Chinese rug.

I CARRIED him to the sofa and deposited him upon it. His features were twisted in pain, and I knew that he was still struggling dumbly to escape from abominable memories.

"Whisky," he muttered. "You'll find a flask in the cabinet by the window—upper left-hand drawer."

When I handed him the flask his fingers tightened about it until the knuckles showed blue. "They nearly got me," he gasped. He drained the stimulant in immoderate gulps, and gradually the color crept back into his face.

"That drug was the very devil!" I murmured.

"It wasn't the drug," he moaned. His eyes no longer glared insanely, but he still wore the look of a lost soul.

"They scented me in time," he moaned. "I went too far."

"What were *they* like?" I said, to humor him.

He leaned forward and gripped my arm. He was shivering horribly. "No word in our language can describe them!" He spoke in a hoarse whisper. "They are symbolized vaguely in the myth of the Fall, and in an obscene form which is occasionally found engraven on ancient tablets. The Greeks had a name for them, which veiled their essential foulness. The tree, the snake and the apple—these are the vague symbols of a most awful mystery."

His voice had risen to a scream. "Frank, Frank, a terrible and unspeakable *deed* was done in the beginning. Before time, the *deed*, and from the deed——"

He had risen and was hysterically pacing the room. "The seeds of the deed move through angles in dim recesses of time. They are hungry and athirst!"

"Chalmers," I pleaded to quiet him. "We are living in the third decade of the Twentieth Century."

"They are lean and athirst!" he shrieked. *"The Hounds of Tindalos!"*

"Chalmers, shall I phone for a physician?"

"A physician can not help me now. They are horrors of the soul, and yet"—he hid his face in his hands and groaned—"they are real, Frank. I saw them for a ghastly moment. For a moment I stood on the *other side*. I stood on the pale gray shores beyond time and space. In an awful light that was not light, in a silence that shrieked, I saw *them*.

"All the evil in the universe was concentrated in their lean, hungry bodies. Or had they bodies? I saw them only for a moment; I can not be certain. *But I heard them breathe.* Indescribably for a moment I felt their breath upon my face. They turned toward me and I fled screaming. In a single moment I fled screaming through time. I fled down quintillions of years.

"But they scented me. Men awake in them cosmic hungers. We have escaped, momentarily, from the foulness that rings them round. They thirst for that in us which is clean, which emerged from the deed without stain. There is a part of us which did not partake in the deed, and that they hate. But do not imagine that they are literally, prosaically evil. They are beyond good and evil as we know it. They are that which in the beginning fell away from cleanliness. Through the deed they became bodies of death, receptacles of all foulness. But they are not evil in *our* sense because in the spheres through which they move there is no thought, no morals, no right or wrong as we understand it. There is merely the pure and the foul. The foul expresses itself through angles; the pure through curves. Man, the pure part of him, is descended from a curve. Do not laugh. I mean that literally."

I rose and searched for my hat. "I'm dreadfully sorry for you, Chalmers," I said, as I walked toward the door. "But I don't intend to stay and listen to such gibberish. I'll

send my physician to see you. He's an elderly, kindly chap and he won't be offended if you tell him to go to the devil. But I hope you'll respect his advice. A week's rest in a good sanitarium should benefit you immeasurably."

I heard him laughing as I descended the stairs, but his laughter was so utterly mirthless that it moved me to tears.

2

When Chalmers phoned the following morning my first impulse was to hang up the receiver immediately. His request was so unusual and his voice was so wildly hysterical that I feared any further association with him would result in the impairment of my own sanity. But I could not doubt the genuineness of his misery, and when he broke down completely and I heard him sobbing over the wire I decided to comply with his request.

"Very well," I said. "I will come over immediately and bring the plaster."

En route to Chalmers' home I stopped at a hardware store and purchased twenty pounds of plaster of Paris. When I entered my friend's room he was crouching by the window watching the opposite wall out of eyes that were feverish with fright. When he saw me he rose and seized the parcel containing the plaster with an avidity that amazed and horrified me. He had extruded all of the furniture and the room presented a desolate appearance.

"It is just conceivable that we can thwart them!" he exclaimed. "But we must work rapidly. Frank, there is a stepladder in the hall. Bring it here immediately. And then fetch a pail of water."

"What for?" I murmured.

He turned sharply and there was a flush on his face. "To mix the plaster, you fool!" he cried. "To mix the plaster that will save our bodies and souls from a contamination unmentionable. To mix the plaster that will save the world from—Frank, *they must be kept out!*"

"Who?" I murmured.

"The Hounds of Tindalos!" he muttered. "They can only reach us through angles. We must eliminate all angles from this room. I shall plaster up all of the corners, all of the crevices. We must make this room resemble the interior of a sphere."

I knew that it would have been useless to argue with him. I fetched the stepladder, Chalmers mixed the plaster, and for three hours we labored. We filled in the four corners of the wall and the intersections of the floor and wall and the wall and ceiling, and we rounded the sharp angles of the window-seat.

"I shall remain in this room until they return in time," he affirmed when our task was completed. "When they discover that the scent leads through curves they will return. They will return ravenous and snarling and unsatisfied to the foulness that was in the beginning, before time, beyond space."

He nodded graciously and lit a cigarette. "It was good of you to help," he said.

"Will you not see a physician, Chalmers?" I pleaded.

"Perhaps — tomorrow," he murmured. "But now I must watch and wait."

"Wait for what?" I urged.

Chalmers smiled wanly. "I know that you think me insane," he said. "You have a shrewd but prosaic mind, and you can not conceive of an entity that does not depend for its existence on force and matter. But did it ever occur to you, my friend, that force and matter are merely the barriers to perception imposed by time and space? When one knows, as I do, that time and space are identical and that they are both deceptive because they are merely imperfect manifestations of a higher reality, one no

longer seeks in the visible world for an explanation of the mystery and terror of being."

I rose and walked toward the door.

"Forgive me," he cried. "I did not mean to offend you. You have a superlative intellect, but I—I have a *superhuman* one. It is only natural that I should be aware of your limitations."

"Phone if you need me," I said, and descended the stairs two steps at a time. "I'll send my physician over at once," I muttered, to myself. "He's a hopeless maniac, and heaven knows what will happen if someone doesn't take charge of him immediately."

3

THE following is a condensation of two announcements which appeared in the Partridgeville Gazette *for July 3, 1928:*

Earthquake Shakes Financial District

At 2 o'clock this morning an earth tremor of unusual severity broke several plate-glass windows in Central Square and completely disorganized the electric and street railway systems. The tremor was felt in the outlying districts and the steeple of the First Baptist Church on Angell Hill (designed by Christopher Wren in 1717) was entirely demolished. Firemen are now attempting to put out a blaze which threatens to destroy the Partridgeville Glue Works. An investigation is promised by the mayor and an immediate attempt will be made to fix responsibility for this disastrous occurrence.

OCCULT WRITER MURDERED BY UNKNOWN GUEST

Horrible Crime in Central Square

Mystery Surrounds Death of Halpin Chalmers

At 9 a. m. today the body of Halpin Chalmers, author and journalist, was found in an empty room above the jewelry store of Smithwick and Isaacs, 24 Central Square. The coroner's investigation revealed that the room had been rented *furnished* to Mr. Chalmers on May 1, and that he had himself disposed of the furniture a fortnight ago. Chalmers was the author of several recondite books on occult themes, and a member of the Bibliographic Guild. He formerly resided in Brooklyn, New York.

At 7 a. m. Mr. L. E. Hancock, who occupies the apartment opposite Chalmers' room in the Smithwick and Isaacs establishment, smelt a peculiar odor when he opened his door to take in his cat and the morning edition of the *Partridgeville Gazette*. The odor he describes as extremely acrid and nauseous, and he affirms that it was so strong in the vicinity of Chalmers' room that he was obliged to hold his nose when he approached that section of the hall.

He was about to return to his own apartment when it occurred to him that Chalmers might have accidentally forgotten to turn off the gas in his kitchenette. Becoming considerably alarmed at the thought, he decided to investigate, and when repeated tappings on Chalmers' door brought no response he notified the superintendent. The latter opened the door by means of a pass key, and the two men quickly made their way into Chalmers' room. The room was utterly destitute of furniture, and Hancock asserts that when he first glanced at the floor his heart went cold within him, and that the superintendent, without saying a word, walked to the open window and stared at the building opposite for fully five minutes.

Chalmers lay stretched upon his back in the center of the room. He was starkly nude, and his chest and arms were covered with a peculiar bluish pus or ichor. His head lay grotesquely upon his chest. It had been completely severed from his body, and the features were twisted

and torn and horribly mangled. Nowhere was there a trace of blood.

The room presented a most astonishing appearance. The intersections of the walls, ceiling and floor had been thickly smeared with plaster of Paris, but at intervals fragments had cracked and fallen off, and someone had grouped these upon the floor about the murdered man so as to form a perfect triangle.

Beside the body were several sheets of charred yellow paper. These bore fantastic geometric designs and symbols and several hastily scrawled sentences. The sentences were almost illegible and so absurd in context that they furnished no possible clue to the perpetrator of the crime. "I am waiting and watching," Chalmers wrote. "I sit by the window and watch walls and ceiling. I do not believe they can reach me, but I must beware of the Doels. Perhaps *they* can help them break through. The satyrs will help, and they can advance through the scarlet circles. The Greeks knew a way of preventing that. It is a great pity that we have forgotten so much."

On another sheet of paper, the most badly charred of the seven or eight fragments found by Detective Sergeant Douglas (of the Partridgeville Reserve), was scrawled the following:

"Good God, the plaster is falling! A terrific shock has loosened the plaster and it is falling. An earthquake perhaps! I never could have anticipated this. It is growing dark in the room. I must phone Frank. But can he get here in time? I will try. I will recite the Einstein formula. I will—God, they are breaking through! They are breaking through! Smoke is pouring from the corners of the wall. Their *tongues*—ahhhhh——"

In the opinion of Detective Sergeant Douglas, Chalmers was poisoned by some obscure chemical. He has sent specimens of the strange blue slime found on Chalmers' body to the Partridgeville Chemical Laboratories; and he expects the report will shed new light on one of the most mysterious crimes of recent years. That Chalmers entertained a guest on the evening preceding the earthquake is certain, for his neighbor distinctly heard a low murmur of conversation in the former's room as he passed it on his way to the stairs. Suspicion points strongly to this unknown visitor and the police are diligently endeavoring to discover his identity.

4

REPORT of James Morton, chemist and bacteriologist:

My dear Mr. Douglas:

The fluid sent to me for analysis is the most peculiar that I have ever examined. It resembles living protoplasm, but it lacks the peculiar substances known as enzymes. Enzymes catalyze the chemical reactions occurring in living cells, and when the cell dies they cause it to disintegrate by hydrolyzation. Without enzymes protoplasm should possess enduring vitality, i. e., immortality. Enzymes are the negative components, so to speak, of unicellular organism, which is the basis of all life. That living matter can exist without enzymes biologists emphatically deny. And yet the substance that you have sent me is alive and it lacks these "indispensable" bodies. Good God, sir, do you realize what astounding new vistas this opens up?

5

EXCERPT from The Secret Watchers *by the late Halpin Chalmers:*

What if, parallel to the life we know, there is another life that does not die, which lacks the elements that destroy *our* life? Perhaps in another dimension there is a *different* force from that which generates our life. Perhaps this force emits energy, or something similar to energy, which

passes from the unknown dimension where *it* is and creates a new form of cell life in our dimension. No one knows that such new cell life does exist in our dimension. Ah, but I have seen *its* manifestations. I have *talked* with them. In my room at night I have talked with the Does. And in dreams I have seen their maker. I have stood on the dim shore beyond time and matter and seen *it*. *It* moves through strange curves and outrageous angles. Some day I shall travel in time and meet *it* face to face.

Ballade of Wandering Ghosts

By HANNA BAIRD CAMPBELL

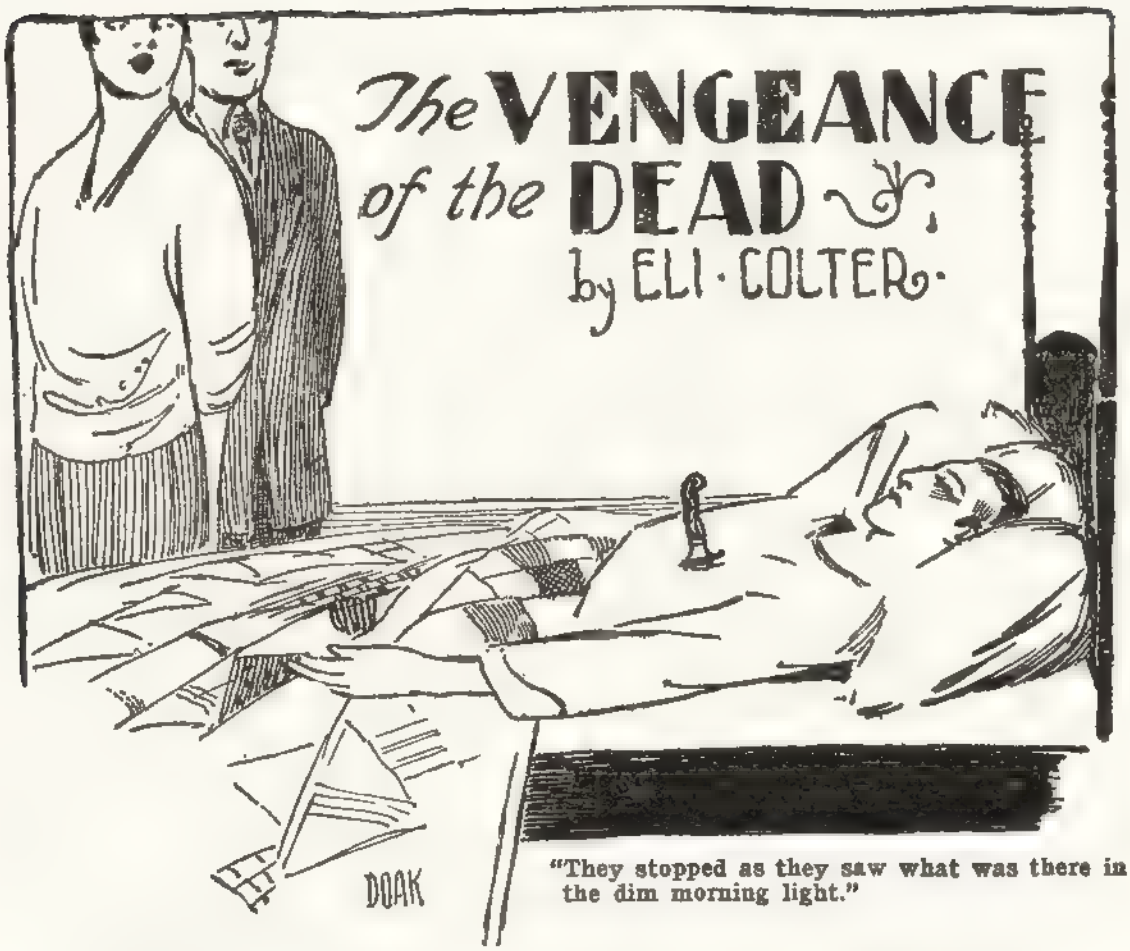
Have you heard the story the old wives tell,
  When winds in the turret sob and groan,
And the bloated moon casts an evil spell
  On the hearts of men when the day has flown?
When shadows out of the void are blown,
  And the reeling stars grow sick and pale,
When phantoms meet and their sins condone—
  Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?

They mumble and mouth of a loathsome dell,
  And a stagnant pool, with dead leaves strown,
Where vapors, foul with the stench of hell,
  Strike the chill of death through blood and bone;
And above the pool on a slimy stone,
  Wrapped in a luminous mist-gray veil,
Sits the ghost of the self-slain Angelone—
  Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?

They swear, at the stroke of the midnight bell,
  Betrayed by her lover, to rest unknown,
Her eery songs on the night-winds swell
  As she hushes her unborn babe's faint moan.
And the old wives clack in an undertone,
  And drown their fears in mugs of ale,
While Love looks down from a rotting throne—
  Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?

ENVOI

Ah, ravished heart, can man atone,
  Or prayers, or penance, or tears avail?
The ghastly harvest is reaped as sown—
  Have you heard them whisper the evil tale?



"They stopped as they saw what was there in the dim morning light."

The Story Thus Far

Jesse and his brother Dan invite a party of friends to their hunting-lodge, Waggener Wilds, in the wilderness. Among others in the party is Ben Tarrton, a handsome man, lionized by the ladies, but Dan for some reason takes a violent dislike to him; and so does Natchez, the caretaker of the lodge, whose expression is one of stark horror as he gazes at Tarrton. Natchez becoming suddenly ill the first night the party is at the lodge, Jesse gets into his car to go to town for a doctor. On the way he finds Natchez's collie-dog, dead, its throat torn open, and drained of its blood. A little farther on he meets Sneath, the hobo who had been helping Natchez at the lodge, and who had been a soldier in Tarrton's company overseas during the war. Sneath is frantic with terror, bawling out, "I seen Tarrton doin' it again, just like I seen him out in No Man's Land—only this time it was Natchez's collie."

4. The Monster

I WAS not half-way home, when Dan was awakened in his room abruptly. For a moment he lay still, wondering what had disturbed him. Then he became acutely aware of commotion outside, and he sat up, listening. He heard, then. It was the hounds, howling loudly. You must remember that he had, all along, at least a suspicion, though he had never fully grasped what a monstrous thing the reality would prove to be. Even what he suspected was ghastly enough. And the moment he heard the hounds howling, he had a faint idea of what he would find.

He leaped out of bed, and Boyce, in the next room, heard him. They called back and forth, and inside of five minutes the whole crowd was in

Dan's room in dressing-gowns and slippers, staring out at the dogs. By this time the police dogs and the setter had joined the hounds, and before Dan had time to wonder where the collie was, Jane Lee remarked that they were all in Dan's room but Ben. Only Ben was still asleep. Marian said nervously that she didn't see how he *could* sleep in such a racket.

The noise was hideous. Dan, more than any of them, was starkly aware of Ben's absence. And he was aware of something else. He felt the awful, pestilential presence brooding over the great, gloomy house. The dawn was just breaking in the sky, a horrible, raw, cold dawn, and the group stood huddled there by the window frightened stiff by the diabolical nameless fear that crowded upon them. Gladstone, desperate for action, wanted to know why Natchez didn't shut the dogs up, and asked where I was. Dan told him Natchez was sick and I had gone for a doctor, and that Chin was too much afraid of the dogs to try to order them about. Lee, terrorized into sobriety, begged Dan to go and see if Ben was all right.

Dan was reluctant to make a move toward that silent room of Ben's, but the whole crowd added their pleas to Lee's and he gave in. He hurried across the hall, not stopping for the formality of a rap on Ben's door. He was too sure of what he'd find. Like terrorized sheep the others crowded after him. But they all stopped short and huddled together again as Dan threw open the door, and they saw what was there in the dim morning light.

Ben had been murdered in his bed. He lay flat on his back, one hand under his head, the other lying loosely across his stomach. But for the telltale waxen pallor of his skin he might have been asleep. A knife, with a large handle of unusual design, was buried to the hilt in his left breast. Not a drop of blood had escaped, since the knife had not been removed. Boyce gasped out something about the knife. Dan told him it was one that had belonged to our father, that it had hung downstairs in his old room. The next instant Dan had a bunch of shaken men and hysterical women on his hands.

He herded them out of the room and downstairs to the living-room, where he built a fire in the fireplace. They were so stunned and stricken that they obeyed him docilely. The women were crying and the men were trying to quiet them, and Dan was having a nasty few moments of it. As he rose from getting a fire blazing, he heard the Hammerton roar up and stop. He rushed to the window and saw me leap out of the car and turn the hose on the dogs. The excited brutes fought the icy water savagely, but they stopped their unearthly howling. I locked them in the garage and dashed up to see Natchez. He had come to, by that time, was quite conscious, but a little weak, and he had been on the point of coming down to quiet the dogs when he heard me arrive.

I asked him what had been the matter with him, and he looked at me queerly, saying that his heart was none too good. I left Chin Hoy still taking care of him, and raced for the house.

Dan met me in the hall, his face white and set, and I saw the huddled, terror-ridden group behind him. "What's the matter?" I asked, wondering what else could have happened to add to the already unendurable horror in which I was striving to retain my mental equilibrium.

"Go up and look in Tarrton's room," Dan answered tersely, and Nan Boyce gave a smothered scream.

I ran upstairs, three steps at a time, but I already had some idea of what I would find. Oddly enough, it steadied my reeling brain. You may think that queer. But out of a night of hideous fantasy and unnamable

madness, plain human murder was something tangible and understandable, something I could get hold of. If you'll believe it, I walked out of that room of death and back down the stairs more nearly my cool normal self than I had been since Dan had come north. When I entered the living-room, and the rest of them turned to stare at me fearfully, my evident calmness had a quieting effect on them that nothing else could have done. I saw it, and lost no time in following up that one grim advantage in that house of horror.

"Does anyone know anything about this?" I asked quietly, as I laid aside my topcoat and gloves.

"No." Dan shook his head, answering for the rest. "The dogs woke us, and we went in and found him like that."

"I see," I said, probably because I could think of nothing else to say. I was thinking rapidly enough, trying to decide upon which was the wiser thing to do next, when Natchez came in the front door and paused in the hall, beckoning to me. I excused myself from my guests for a moment and went to see what he wanted.

"Has something happened, Mr. Waggener?" he asked quietly, and to my astonishment the man was quite himself again. I remarked on it. "Heart attacks like mine don't leave much trace after they're over," he said, and asked again if something had happened. I told him Ben had been murdered in his sleep, and asked him where Chin was. He merely nodded at hearing of that grisly death upstairs, and said he knew from the howling of the dogs that death was around somewhere, then informed me that he had ordered Chin Hoy to stay in the garage till some of us should call him. "Was that right?" he finished.

I told him I approved of it, and requested him to come into the living-room with me, thinking I might be able to use him. He followed, his face expressionless, and took his place leaning up against one corner of the fireplace mantel a little way from Dan, as I again faced my guests. I really was grateful for the harshness of fact, sad as it made me to know that Ben was dead. Delving into a murder would take my mind off the hideous chimeras that had been harassing me. I was determined to do what I could myself, before calling in an officer. With that in view, as the most logical beginning, I turned to my brother.

"You locked up, Dan?"

"I certainly did." He looked me squarely in the eye. "Every door, and shot every bolt from garret to cellar, as you requested."

I shrank at what that meant, but there was nothing for it except the truth. I felt the harshness of my own tones as I spoke, to them all, collectively: "You will realize that, in that case, the house could not have been entered. As a matter of fact, it could not even have been approached. The dogs would have driven off any intruder."

Rick Boyce started, stared at me, and demanded belligerently, "What are you hinting at, Jesse?"

"I'm not hinting, Rick," I answered, giving him back his look. "I'm merely stating an obvious fact. All of you noted the bars on the windows. With the doors securely bolted and locked, this house is as impregnable as an armed fort. Therefore, the person who killed Ben Tarrton was *in* the house when the doors were locked. That fact is unassailable."

"But, good heavens, man," Lee burst out indignantly, "you aren't accusing——"

"I'm accusing no one of anything," I interrupted tersely. "I'm merely stating the fact that no person could have entered this house save those of you who are now here! And somebody killed Ben Tarrton since 11 o'clock last night."

A scream answered me, a scream that was barely audible, the mere exudation of an exhausted breath, and Jane Lee threw herself into her husband's arms.

"Let's keep as cool as we can, please." I swept my gaze over the entire group. Only Dan and Natchez were cool and self-possessed. Dan was rather white and his eyes had a queer light in them, but Natchez was almost bored. It was none of Natchez's affair, anyhow, and I couldn't expect Dan to get excited over the death of a man he had disliked from the moment he first saw him. I felt sorriest, I think, for Marian Gladstone. She sat like a person stunned, cowed into a state bordering on vacuity. Action was the thing that would be good for her, I knew, and with that in mind I spoke to her. "Marian, I think a good hot cup of coffee would benefit us, and I don't want Chin brought in yet. Would you make us a pot of coffee?"

She rose with a flash of eager assent in her eyes, and I gestured toward the kitchen. "You'll find kindling in a box by the stove," I told her, "and small wood in a box on the stoop, just outside the side kitchen door."

She nodded and hurried from the room. I turned my attention back to the task before me.

"OF COURSE, most of you know nothing about this affair, anyway," I began. "But one of you *must* know precisely *all* about it. That one will save the rest of us a great deal of unpleasantness if he will come out with it like a gentleman."

"You're going rather far," Boyce interrupted, angrily.

"I'll not forget that I am your host," I answered. "I simply want to have this business over as quickly as possible. I see no need for the inquisition of extensive questioning. Anyone could have driven that knife. Its own weight would have been enough for the death blow. We must face the facts. Ben lies dead in an impregnable house into which a party of people have been locked. Yet all of us here were his closest friends. We——"

"See here, Jesse." Rick Boyce got to his feet and faced me abruptly. "Before we go any further with this thing let's get down to cases. It's utterly ridiculous to accuse any of us of having done away with Ben. Why, he was one of the best friends I ever had — one of the finest chaps I've ever known. I'm certain the rest of us here held him always in high esteem."

"You bet we did," Gladstone affirmed quickly, wiping his glasses with shaking fingers.

"All of us," Lee said, his comedy sunk in sober grief, and he looked at me over the head of his wife, burrowed into his breast. "Nobody could have really hated Ben. It's utterly ridiculous, just as Rick says, even to intimate that any of us could have—could have——" He stammered, and Boyce picked up the sentence smoothly.

"Could have done such a thing. And it's just as ridiculous to try to locate the murderer before we do a little calculating. No, no, Jesse. Your deduction is absurd. Somebody must have gotten in, somehow."

"Nobody *could* have gotten in," I retorted. I was becoming more and more myself with every moment. Facing logical reasoning had brought me up sharply, chased the terrors out of my brain and planted my feet firmly in a solid everyday environment. Already the horrors of the past night were faded into so dim a piece of fantasy that I could laugh at them, and at the whole chain of incidents which had caused them, culminating in that poor fool of a raving drunkard. I sighed in positive relief, straightened my shoulders, and went on briskly. "What kind of calculating do you wish to assume, Rick?"

"Well, first, where the devil did that knife come from?" Rick returned.

"I'll show you," I answered, not knowing then that Dan had already told him. I crossed to Father's old room, slipped my hand in my pocket for the key, and started, to find it absent and not with the other keys on my ring. Then I remembered, and turned to my brother. "Oh, I've not got the key. I gave it to you last night, Dan. May I have it, please."

He took the key from his pocket and extended it toward me. I accepted it and unlocked the door. The guests crowded behind me as I threw back the door and entered the room. Silently I gestured to the place where the knife had hung. Set into the opposite wall was a high, polished board. Into the board seven spikes were driven, and on six of the protruding spikes hung knives of diminishing size but identical in construction with the knife buried in Tarrton's chest. The seventh spike was empty, the spike that had held the biggest knife. I motioned toward it.

"That's where the knife hung. My father was an expert knife-thrower—it was a hobby of his. He had them hung up there that way to prevent their falling from an insecure peg of any kind. They are dangerous playthings."

"But, listen, Jesse!" Boyce was talking again. "None of us has been in this room as yet. We'd never even looked inside of it. And the door was locked and you had the key. Why, think, man! Whoever killed Ben knew, he had to know, of the existence of those knives. And that lets every darned one of us out!"

I started. God save me for a fool, but I had not till that moment even considered suspicion pointing at Dan. But I saw it now. We all saw it at once. I saw a look dart from eye to eye. I felt a thought dart from brain to brain. Dan knew of the knives. Dan had had my key when the thing was done. I realized that my face was slowly whitening, as I waved them all out of the room and locked that door behind me. I followed them dumbly into the living-room and they congregated in a hushed, appalled group, drawn aside from Dan. He stood leaning up against the fireplace again, looking them over with faint cynical amusement. Natchez was staring at him with startled eyes. I had lost my power of speech, and the hideous silence that had fallen upon us was rasping my nerves.

"Surely," Boyce spoke quietly, almost gently, striving to help me get a grip on myself, "you can see what I say is logical, Jesse. Isn't it perfectly obvious?"

"Y-yes," I admitted dumbly. "Of course. It had to be someone who—who knew of the knives. And—there—there is no other key. But—by God, that's infamous! It can't be possible!" They all knew what I meant.

Dan smiled faintly. "I didn't do it," he said, taking the bull by the horns with a flatness that made me gasp. He turned to Boyce. "The supposition isn't infamous, as Jesse says; it's only silly. If you have any observant senses at all, Rick, you must have seen that I was as astounded at finding Tarrton like that as any of you were." Which was true. He hadn't expected to find Ben *dead*. He finished sarcastically, "I should call it the intelligent thing to search for evidence of some kind before the deed is hung on the most likely person handy. And there are such things as finger prints, you know."

"Don't get nasty, Dan," I put in, hastily, seeing the indignant expression that flashed into Rick's face, "we'll leave the finger prints to the experts. I'm going up to Ben's room and see whether or not there is any evidence, any clue that can help us. Natchez, since you and I were the only ones locked out of the house, I shall ask you to come with me."

NATCHEZ followed me up to Ben's room, with a queer backward glance at Dan. But we found nothing. I stood around rather helplessly, I fear, not paying much attention to Natchez and his businesslike examination of the room. My mind was stricken with a new horror. My kid brother Dan! Caught in a net of circumstantial evidence! I knew well enough it *was* circumstantial, that Dan had never killed Ben. But what would that avail, with the circumstances as they were?

He had been in Mexico for six years. He was a stranger to most of the party. Boyce, the Gladstones and I had all heard him say he did not like Ben, and he had certainly acted queerly about that, too. The house was locked. No one could have got in. He was the only one in the house who knew of the knives, and he had had my key in his pocket.

I felt sick at the pit of my stomach as I followed Natchez back to the living-room. Rick asked eagerly if we had found anything.

"No," I said dully. "No clue." I did not even glance at Natchez. If he had found anything he would have told me. I looked at the crowd of friends, those who had long been my friends, but I viewed them now with hostile eyes. A horrible suspicion was growing into a cloud over them, looming and menacing. They were, one and all, already convinced that my brother was the murderer in their midst. But I saw they shrank from facing me squarely. They waited for me to end the silence, flashing covert glances at each other, fidgeting uneasily, while Dan surveyed them collectively with a cool, ironic, half-amused gaze. I couldn't endure it longer.

"Well, somebody did it!" I burst out, hotly. "And there's always something to tell the tale. If the guilty person is not willing to come clean, I must do the next best thing and send for the sheriff."

Marian cried out sharply. She had just come back from the kitchen. I only nodded at her. The sheriff would find the guilty one, fast enough, I told myself desperately. That was the one way to extricate Dan. The sheriff must be brought. I turned straining eyes on Dan. His face had become grim, and there was an ugly glare in his deep-set black eyes.

"Oh, Benny! Benny!" Nan Boyce cried suddenly, in the hysteria of grief.

Dan flared, like a man at the end of his patience. "Your little tin god's dead," he rasped. "Stop grieving over the rotter. I'm here to tell you that to any man who killed Ben Tarrton society owes a vote of thanks."

A gasp of horror rose from over the room. I'm not sure that it was not harshest and quickest from me. Dan faced down our incredulous stare with flaming eyes.

"How can you judge what he must have done to someone, to have brought that on himself? If he never did another thing but what he did to me, he deserved killing as richly as any convict in a death cell waiting the rope."

"Dan! Dan!" I interrupted him, terrified at the thing he was doing to himself. It looked black enough for him already. "You said you never saw him before!"

"And I never did," Dan corroborated. I couldn't stop him. He was insane with fury, roused to a pitch of insane anger over the rising of some old ghost, shaken with a rage that had been born years ago and had never died, the worst rage a man can know. His words came crackling from his sneering mouth. "But I've crossed his trail before. The man was a hellion—with the women. How do I know? Because he took the girl I was to have married, seven years ago. She died. Don't ask me how—it's too horrible to repeat. Through him she died. I'd have killed him right then if I could have got my hands on him.

But he was out of harm's way, overseas. After I buried her, I guess I was crazy for a while.

"I wanted to get out of the United States. I didn't want to murder anybody. But I knew I didn't dare stay in the States after he came back. I went to Mexico. You thought it was because I was peeved that I didn't get overseas. Hell! It was because I didn't want to commit murder! And I pitched into work like a fool to keep it out of my mind. If I'd known he was to be one of this party I'd never have come north. When I did come, and found him with your crowd, it was all I could do to endure it. I didn't kill him, but I'm glad he's dead."

"Dan!" I cried, into the torrent of words, and gripped his arm. He turned his ghastly face and blazing eyes on me.

"Sorry if I've made an ass of myself," he said curtly. "But it's true, and I don't take a word of it back. You people are grieving over a skunk —over a hell-monster of the worst kind. You'd be sick to death if you knew what a fiend he was. Give it out that he committed suicide. For God's sake, don't sick the sheriff on the human benefactor that knifed that devil in a saint's body."

A numb silence fell over the room. I was cold to the heart. Couldn't Dan see that after such an outburst as that, not a person in the room could be made to believe he hadn't killed Ben? But I had only one thing to do. My reeling brain held tenaciously to one thin thread of hope—the sheriff would find the murderer, there *was* always something to tell the tale. I dropped my hand from Dan's arm and turned to Natchez.

"Natchez, take the Hammerton—and go for the sheriff."

Natchez nodded, and crossed the room toward the hall, almost shambling, like a man stricken. I saw his eyes cling to Dan's face, and then Dan, aware that the caretaker was staring at him, swung round his head and looked after him. Natchez jerked his thumb in a slight beckoning gesture. Then he was gone. Dan looked swiftly around the room, to see whether or not the guests had observed that little byplay, but all of them were meticulously avoiding looking that way. My brother whirled silently, stepped into the hall as noiselessly as a cat, and followed Natchez.

My brain was whirling. What could that possibly mean? Had Natchez found something in the room upstairs after all, something he had kept from me? What could he want of Dan? I stared at my guests. They were meticulously avoiding my gaze. In that moment I hated them. They had condemned Dan. I flared at them, harshly:

"Kindly stay where you are till I return. I want to speak to Dan."

None of them answered, but they looked at me with open pity as I wheeled and hurried from the room. Off to the side, out of view from the living-room, I saw Dan and Natchez just passing into the garage. I was determined to know what went on between them. I broke into a light run, circled the garage, and came up to it on the opposite side. Dan and Natchez would not go upstairs, I knew. They wouldn't want Chin Hoy to hear what they said. They would stay down where the cars were.

I was correct in my calculations. I slipped up to the small side window and peered through the pane. Dan and Natchez had come to a halt by the Hammerton, and Natchez was speaking.

"Dan—just what will the sheriff do when he gets here?"

"Why, the usual thing, Natchez," Dan answered. He lit a cigarette, raised one foot to the running-board and leaned comfortably on the fore-door. His rage had subsided, now. Only a somber gleam smoldered in the black depths. I could see and hear them both quite plainly. Dan went

on to explain: "He'll question everybody, search the house and the people, examine Tarrton's room for a clue, and all that sort of thing. He might find something you and Jesse overlooked. Things to which the layman would attach no importance might be of inestimable value to the sheriff. In sparsely settled country like this the sheriff is the whole works, you know—police force, detective agency and everything else. And a lot of those fellows are pretty keen."

"Yes." Natchez nodded, his grouchy face dark and his eyes harried. "Have you thought of your position, Dan?"

"It's not so menacing as Jesse thinks." And Dan smiled. "As Jesse said, there is always something to tell the tale. Finger prints, maybe nothing but a hair or a thread from a garment. But always something. And then, if he doesn't find anything in the way of a clue, there is always the third degree. Oh, he'll find the guilty one, Natchez. Under adequate pressure, the murderer will break."

"But—suppose no one breaks!" Natchez moved close, and his eyes were like phosphorus. "Suppose everyone in that party *is* innocent. Suppose there is not the least clue—no finger prints—nothing. Then what?"

Dan stared at him. "What are you getting at, Natchez? If such a condition could exist, my neck wouldn't be worth a last year's rent receipt, of course. But it can't exist!"

"It does exist," Natchez said shortly. "But your neck has got to be saved some way. God knows how it can be done."

Dan's face whitened, and he gripped Natchez by the arm, convulsively. "How can it exist? What do you mean? How do you know?"

"I know who killed Ben Tarrton," Natchez answered.

"What!" Dan stood like a man frozen, then he slowly took out his cigarette case and tried to light a cigarette with his shaking fingers. "You *know?*"

"I certainly do."

Dan's hand, in the act of lighting the cigarette that quivered in his hold, stopped short, and I could see the reflection of the flame in his wild eyes. "Well, for God's sake, who? Out with it, man!"

"The dead." Natchez bowed his head, with a strange reverence. "The dead killed him. Not one, but a hundred. All those dead whom he tortured to the last gasp." Natchez's face was suddenly ghastly, and his voice sank lower. "You know what he was, don't you? You know that—he was"—lower and lower dropped the hideous gasp, as Natchez looked back on some unspeakable horror he could not forget—"he was—a——"

But I could not get that last word. I strained my ears for the slightest sound. Natchez did not say it again.

"God!" Dan cried. "Holy God! Not that!"

5. *The Vengeance of the Dead*

"YES!" Natchez cried vehemently. "He was! And you're in a net so tight that only the power of God can help you. But He will stand by, Dan. I tell you He will. And so will I. I'll get you out of this if it takes *my* life!"

"You! Why?" Dan's dark face was filled with wonder.

And then again I saw the miracle of Natchez's dour and sour countenance refined and softened into a splendid humanity. "Because," he said in a strangely vibrant tone of gratitude, "you are Borden Waggener come alive again, and Borden Waggener was the only man who would ever believe me. I told him what had shaken me from my moorings, almost driven me from sanity, and he believed."

"It was—Tarrton?" Dan asked swiftly.

"Yes." Natchez's face flamed with

righteous hatred and anger. "It was that hell-hound they called Tarrton. When the war broke out I enlisted and was sent across. I wasn't so young, but I was a good cook and they made me a mess sergeant. My wife and daughter followed me. I never knew how they managed it, but they did. I had been sent to the trenches, and what with the tangle of the mail and the rigidity of the censorship, I didn't know they were there. Then I got messed up, was sent to the hospital and invalided home.

"Not till then did I find out that my wife and daughter had followed me. My wife died over there of the flu, but my daughter came back here. Over there she had met a captain and fallen in love with him. He had finally been sent back to the front, she had met him on leave, and she came home to see me, having discovered that I was wounded and sent to the States. She was puzzled and frightened by things she did not understand, and she was afraid at first to tell me. Her very fear drove her to detailing the whole thing, though.

"She said that when she was with this fellow she was always so happy and well. He was a man the women fancied a great deal. And she gave me his name, and described him, with his white skin and dark eyes and red hair. But when he went away from her she always felt such a strange depletion of her strength. I knew something terrible had happened to her. She was as white and bloodless as though the red fluid had been drawn from her veins. I began to suspect right then what he was, especially when she spoke of his big white teeth. They were so large, she said, for a man's teeth, and so terribly powerful. He could lift the weight of his huge body by his teeth.

"I felt that the only way to raise any protection about her was to make myself capable of leaving my body in sleep. I watched her at night, when she was asleep and didn't know, but I couldn't see him come. I went to a professor of mysticism and studied like a fiend. I got so that I could get out of my body by willing myself out. Then I watched her again—out of the body, you understand. As long as I was in the flesh I couldn't see him, and I couldn't stop him. But when I was out I saw him fast enough. He came in the window, and started toward her bed, but I leaped between them. I grappled with him, to find that he was much stronger than I. I had no chance with him. He threw me aside as though I were a stick, rushed to the bed and leaned over her—and as I watched he changed to a monstrous cat. The next instant his face was against hers, and he was sucking the breath from her mouth with his. I heard her horrible gasping struggles, but I was powerless. I moaned and shrieked at him, leaping on his back and beating at him. He drew the life out of her till he had his fill, in spite of my puny assault, changed back to the form of a man, and went away again as he had come, laughing as he slipped through the window.

"I got back in my body and struggled to bring her back to consciousness. She was appallingly weak. I began to be afraid that she was gone. But by morning she had recovered enough to open her eyes, to dress and trail languidly about the house. Frantic with fear for her, I rushed to my professor of mysticism. And he explained to me exactly the kind of monster I had to deal with. He was not a vampire, he wasn't a werewolf, he wasn't any commonly understood type of monstrosity. He was a combination of them all, and something else besides. This was the explanation of his activities, Dan, as the professor outlined them to me.

"He came to this planet when the powers threw him off one of the dark stars. As far as the professor could judge, that was somewhere around a thousand years ago."

"What! Is he that old?" Dan exclaimed.

"That old anyway, yes. He's had two or three existences. In one he was a werewolf. In one he was a vampire. In one he was a soul-stealer. In this last existence he was all combined. He kept abreast of the times as the world advanced, living first on one part of the globe, then on another. He presented to society the appearance of a wealthy man of the world, and no one ever suspected what he was. He was too smooth, too sly. But to keep his body and spirit replenished he continually was forced to gorge himself on warm blood, and to breathe into his throat the souls of women.

"For that reason he was always on hand when any country went to war. He assumed the dress and language of the country, and through his unholy black magic got himself into some not too prominent position—where he could reach the battlefield. When a battle was over and the field was strewn with the dead and dying, he changed to a wolf, slunk among the corpses and wounded and drank enough of blood to keep his youth intact for another decade. He could always find a war, you realize. If too long a stretch occurred between wars, he resorted to his werewolf form and went into the wild country where he could tear open the throat of some animal.

"Oh, he was hideously sly and clever! Always his tracks were covered so that not even any strange gossip could rise and follow him wherever he wanted to go. And that monstrous loathsome ghoul was breathing the soul from my daughter's body to replenish his ghastly spirit! I begged the professor in terror to tell me what I could do. I asked him why in God's name the monster hadn't been annihilated before. He told me sadly that only a few of the initiate such as he knew Tarrton for what he was. There was only one way in which he could be forever laid low, only one way in which he could be killed, body, brain and bestial spirit."

"And that?" Dan breathed, so low I could but faintly hear him.

"While he was out of the body, away where he could not protect it, some other man must accomplish the thing. The avenger must pass out of his own body, and must be possessed of the power to move material things while in that form. He must take a heavy knife, a long one with a blade that would sink into the heart. He must carry that knife to the monster's sleeping empty body. In one hand he must carry a mixture of the ashes of one victim the monster had slain and the blood of another, stirred into a paste. A hole must be drilled into the point of the knife and packed with that paste. Then the avenger must call around him the disembodied souls of all the victims the monster had claimed. Those souls must mass around him in a mighty impassable group while he drove the knife deep into the heart of the sleeping monster-body. And as the knife sank in they must with one accord chant the incantation which would blast his hellish spirit.

"I did not know how I could ever accomplish such a hideous thing, a thing that others had tried to do, and that he had always easily foiled, for always they lacked some one thing that was vital to the accomplishing of the deed. But I would have moved heaven and earth to save my daughter. I rushed back—only to find her gone. He had, by subtle mental suggestion, urged her to flee from me, raging at the thought that I wanted to cheat him of her life. I think I went insane for a while. But after a few horrible days I grew calmer, then set out to follow her. I traced her slowly, by devious means, to find that he had beaten me after all. She had died in a charity hospital and some kind-hearted person had buried her.

"From then on I had but one motive in living. It was to blast him forever. I studied and practised magic night and day, but my mind had been so heavily taxed that it gave way under the strain, and all my power fell from me. Hopeless, I decided to commit suicide, to go on from this life and find her where she might be. It was then your father stopped me, and listened to my story, and believed me, and sent me up here to gain strength and sanity again. He used to come up here and work with me. I grew strong and level-minded before he died. I went back to my magic. Then I discovered that the very fiend I planned to kill was now a friend of your brother's. I doubled my efforts.

"I got so I could leave my body and move material things. Out of the body, I went to my fair daughter's grave and brought back a small bit of her ashes. Then Jesse wrote me they were coming up here for this outing. God had delivered the fiend into my hands. I knew it had been some time since he had been able to get his fill of blood. The instant I laid eyes on him I saw that he was losing his strength a little. I knew he would claim a victim that night the moment he could get out of the body. I had already taken that largest knife and drilled a hole in the point. But I had placed it back on the spike so that its absence might not cause any comment from you or Jesse.

"As soon as I saw the lights upstairs in the lodge, I knew he had gone to his room and would be quickly at his activities. I immediately repaired to my room and left my body. I went out into the yard and watched. Chin Hoy, seeing the state of my body, thought I was sick and called Jesse, but I dared not delay. The monster had already come from the lodge and started toward the garage. I had to follow him. He had already taken on his wolf form. He made a ravenous attack on my dogs. The four dogs that were not chained fled in terror. I do not think they could see him clearly, but they sensed and feared him. That only delighted his hellish soul, and he leaped after the collie and raced to the kill.

"The collie fled madly down the road. Chin was then in the house, where he had gone to get Jesse. I raced, too, after the fiend. Nearly a half-mile down the road he caught the collie, and leaped to his kill, to tear open the dog's throat. He was so ravenously thirsty for his ghoulish drink that he did not notice me. I went so close that I reached a hand down under the furry body and caught two or three drops of blood that slobbered from his wolf jaws. That was all I wanted.

"Wild with fury, I ran back to the garage, and passed Jesse tearing to town for the doctor. I went to the hiding-place I had made in the garage and brought forth the sacred ashes of my daughter, and of them and the blood of my noble collie I made the magic paste, saying over it the incantation the professor had taught me. Carrying the precious paste carefully, I hurried into the lodge. Locked doors were nothing to me. I walked right through the door into your father's room, took down the knife and packed the paste into the hole in its blade. Then I passed through the door into the hall. The knife, in my hands, was as capable of passing through wooden panels as I.

"I leaped up the stairs, calling with all my might on the souls of all his ravaged victims. I was shaken by the response that answered me. By the hundreds they came, out of all the centuries he had blasphemed with his presence; women from whom he had drawn the souls, men from whom he had drained blood on the battlefield, animals of every species from whom he had torn the life and of whom he had emptied the veins. They knew what I wanted of them. With a holy cry of vengeance, the vengeance of

the dead, they massed around me as I hurtled into his room.

"There that hellishly beautiful body lay, asleep, while back down the road the werewolf crouched and gorged himself. I called on all the powers of heaven as I raised high the big knife, and the souls of the dead chanted their mighty incantation. Slowly I lowered the knife, and slowly I drove the blade home. The fiend felt that avenging steel the moment the point touched his flesh. He knew he was in danger of his hellish existence. He screamed and tried to get back. But in vain! The knife reached his heart, and before our eyes—the eyes of the dead and me—his monstrous spirit was blasted into a million fragments and whirled into the pit of oblivion forever.

"And then—I saw a marvelous sight. Those weary and ravaged dead began to glow with golden light. Their haunted eyes became blessed with peace. One by one they blessed me as they passed me, singing, and even the beasts he had ravaged frisked at my heels and licked my hands as they went on. One of the last to go was my fair daughter. She leaned to press a kiss on my cheek, but I could not bear to see her go. I walked with her for a long way before I finally bade her a temporary farewell and returned to my body.

"Chin Hoy was still there, and Jesse had returned. I knew a hue and cry would be raised when the monster's body was found, and the howling of the dogs had already apprised you of his death. But I had thought that, finding no guilty person in the house, the verdict would be death at the hands of a person unknown. I had not reckoned with the hideous net of circumstantial evidence that had closed around you. You were the only man who slept alone. The other men have their wives with them and therefore possess a perfect alibi. I am terrorized, Dan. I could tell my story, but they would laugh me out of court. You must not be sacrificed! But what can we do?"

"God! I don't know!" Dan's face was ghastly. "We're together, you and I, Natchez. Your daughter—she and I quarreled over a silly thing. I met her after you went overseas. When we quarreled, she and her mother followed you. Then she came back—and when *he,* that hellion, drove her from you, she fled to me, and I saw her die before my eyes. It was I who buried her, just before I went to Mexico."

"You—Dan!" Natchez cried. "You—and my daughter!"

"Yes." Dan's white face quivered. "I knew there was something horrible back of it, the way she died. I studied those things, too. I learned who and what he was, and how he could be conquered. But I could never gain even the first rudimentary ability in magic. I was powerless. I didn't want to live, but I had to, so I made the best of it. If I have to die because that fiend died, if they hang me on circumstantial evidence, I think I shall be glad to go on with her."

"No!" Natchez cried. "No! You shall not be his last victim! He shall not claim another, even by roundabout means. God listens, Dan. Pray! You and I together—pray!"

6. The Loyalty of the Living

I TURNED away from the window, then. Dan must be saved! And it was I who had to do it. I, as the tool of the divine power who would not let his innocent children suffer overlong. We were here, all of us, at this lodge, in an ordinary world, with an ordinary murder to face. The unbelieving world, that would laugh at Natchez's story as the raving of a madman, must have some commonplace explanation of the thing that had happened, of the death that had occurred. And suddenly, like a sequence unrolled on a silver sheet before my eyes, I saw the way.

I whirled and raced down the road to a spot I remembered, stooped and picked up something from the brush and slipped it into my pocket. Then I circled the house, keeping out of sight of those within the living-room. At the rear of the house I entered it noiselessly by the side kitchen door, which was unlocked by Marian when she went into the kitchen to make the coffee. I crossed the kitchen and descended the stairs into the cellar. There I hurried to the outer door, threw back the heavy bolts, unlocked it, opened the door and passed out, leaving it wide behind me.

Then I went back around the house and up the front steps. The guests heard me cross the veranda and enter the hall, and they crowded to the door as I came into the living-room. Their anxiety and concern clogged their tongues. I spoke quickly, to forestall their questions.

"I want to ask you to wait till I run up to Ben's room again. When I come down I hope to present to you a chain of evidence that will be unbreakable."

They nodded, as one, waiting dumbly to know what I might have to say. I hurried on up the stairs. That business of looking in his room again was all bluff, but it was part of the swift plan that had formed in my head. I walked into his bed chamber, disarranged the bed clothes a trifle, stood looking down for a moment upon the beautiful foul dead face, then went back down the stairs. The guests watched me in an agony of suspense as I stepped to the front door to call Natchez. He thrust his head out of the garage to see what I wanted, and I told him to come immediately, and to bring Dan and Chin Hoy. Before we others had gathered again in the living-room, I heard those three come running across the yard and up the steps. Then the next thing they were all crowded excitedly around me, seeing in my face that I had something startling to tell.

"Did you find anything, Jesse?" Rick Boyce burst out. "For God's sake, don't keep us in suspense."

"Yes," I said. "I understand. But I want you all to settle down quietly and listen to me. I think a good drink would brace us all up."

"Oh!" Marian cried. "I forgot all about the coffee."

"Coffee!" I smiled. "It's hardly what we want now, anyway, Marian. Chin Hoy, go down in the cellar and get a bottle of Scotch for the men and one of Benedictine for the ladies. Can't you all just take it easy, please?"

They stared at me, and Dan and Natchez, close together, hung on my words. They did not know I had been near the garage.

"Follow me closely, and you will see that it is so simple you will wonder why we did not trace it all out before. When Natchez and I were up before we did not look on the bed—we did not want to disturb the body. But I looked just now, and——"

I paused abruptly as I heard Chin Hoy come scurrying up the basement stairs. He raced across the kitchen and burst into the room to confront us with a frightened face, a bottle in each hand.

"Basement door, Missa· Wegeneh. Wide open. Bolts up. Must be open all night, no?"

"What?" cried Dan, explosively. A chorus of excited cries came from the room about me and I raised a hand, asking for silence.

"That's the last link," I said steadily. Then swiftly I wove my web, the web that was to save Dan. "You will remember the hobo, Sneath. He had no trouble approaching the house; you recollect he had made friends with the dogs. When he left here he must have sneaked back and hidden himself in the basement before the doors were locked. There are plenty of places there where he could hide. His motive we know, from what Ben himself said: cheap revenge for

fancied imposition. He had been here helping Natchez clean house, so he knew of the knives. I saw him have a bunch of pass keys, so he would have had little trouble when he went to unlock the door. He helped Natchez put away the luggage, so he had Ben's room located. When you had all gone to bed, he slipped quietly up from the basement, entered Father's old room, got the knife and slipped upstairs, knifed Ben, stole back again and went out through the basement.

"But this—this is the thing that makes the chain complete. I found it just a moment ago, in the bedclothes by Ben's arm. It evidently dropped as Sneath leaned over in the dark."

I thrust my hand into my pocket, drew forth the thing my fingers touched, and held up for their inspection a small piece of bright green silk studded with yellow polka dots, made into a bow and fastened on little celluloid nibs.

"By God!" Lee cried, staring. "The hobo's trick tie!"

Instantly the room was in an uproar as they crowded around me, laughing half hysterically in their relief, slapping me on the back and congratulating everybody that the mystery was solved. Only Natchez and Dan stood stock-still, staring at me with shocked eyes. They thought I believed it too, you know. I had to stop either of them from saying anything to spoil what I had done.

"Into the kitchen with you, everybody," I demanded, "for a much-needed bracer. Chin Hoy, run along and open those bottles."

With the effervescent spirit of relief surging through them, the guests followed the Chinese into the kitchen. The caretaker and my brother did not move. When the last guest had gone, Dan took a step toward me.

"Jesse!" he said hoarsely. "Don't you realize that you've built such a chain of evidence around that Sneath that any court in the land would hang him?"

"Certainly," I answered steadily. "The evidence is absolutely indefeasible."

"But," Dan gasped, "you can't! You can't hang an innocent man!"

"Listen to me!" I cut him short. I looked him steadily in the eye, measuring the ground step by step.

How much must I tell? Must I tell that, as I got out of my car that morning to silence the dogs, I had seen Sneath's little green tie in the car seat and tossed it out into the brush by the road? No, not that. Must I tell that I knew Sneath had killed Willotson, knew it by his own admission, since I now realized that all Sneath had said was true? No, not that, either. Only one part of the grim truth did I need to tell.

"Listen, Dan. They would hang Sneath on that evidence, if they could, and rightly, for he was a murderer. But they can't hang him. He is already dead. As I came back from town this morning I saw his body lying doubled up by the railroad track. A wild beast, or something, had torn his throat open, but had been frightened away before it could work any further horrors upon him. I placed his body in the tool house, intending to send an undertaker for it. Now—I shall send the sheriff."

Dan turned his white face and awed eyes upon Natchez. For a moment they held each other's gaze in a wordless communication that I understood, though they did not know that.

"His last victim," Dan muttered. "But even Sneath is free, now."

"What?" I said, pretending not to have heard clearly.

"Nothing." Dan straightened, threw an arm about Natchez's shoulders and one about mine. "Let's go get a drink. Then Natchez and I will drive for the sheriff."

[THE END]

The Celadon Vase

by John Murray Reynolds

"Ah, Madonna," he said slowly, "you come too late. Ser Nicolo will break no more vases."

THERE was but little light in the chamber of Messer Lorenzo Fiorelli, though a summer sun bathed the Emilian plain in a clear, ambient light and the snow on the peaks of the distant Apennines sparkled like sheets of quartz. It was always dim in that chamber, for Messer Lorenzo seemed to prefer to work in a murky twilight. Perhaps there is something about alchemy that prospers better in the shadows, but more likely it was but a survival of old habits—for the alchemist had once been a sorcerer and astrologer of note.

There had been a time when all Italy rang with the praises of one Sextus Sapientus, who practised necromancy, astrology and similar questionable arts in a dark and gloomy house in one of the lesser quarters of the Most Serene Republic. There were few in Venice who did not pass through the heavy door of that house at one time or another, seeking either the subtle poisons dispensed by the learned mage or the equally subtle charms and amulets or—and these most frequent of all—news of what portents were held by the stars. Rumor had it that even the Ten themselves were not above consulting the mage upon occasion, and since he always assiduously denied this fact it is probably true.

Sextus All-knowing, to quote the name he had so modestly taken, had prospered greatly. Partly it was because he avoided dabbling in politics or other matters beyond his sphere, partly because he was chary of selling poisons and notably successful in the dispensing of love potions, and partly because he saved and used his money with wisdom worthy of a true

Venetian. The years had turned his dark hair white and impaired his hearing, but they had also brought him a sizable fortune. Now, under his true name of Lorenzo Fiorelli, he dwelt quietly in his Villa Sequestra on the outskirts of Ravola and gave his time to certain obscure studies.

Darkness had been an essential accompaniment of his earlier practises in that it put his patrons in a proper state of mind to view wonders and hear prophecies. It was alchemy that claimed him now, those delicate and subtle processes that attempt to transmute baser metal into gold, and old habits led him to choose a shadowy chamber that had but one small casement for his laboratory.

Messer Lorenzo sat at a table beneath this one window, writing busily on a broad sheet of parchment. He was robed all in black velvet, even to the skull-cap that covered his bald pate. The fur that bordered his robe and lined the broad sleeves was of the same sober color. A heavy gold chain circled his neck and carried a pendant that hung low on his chest—but this pendant was not the cross that might be so worn by a devout Christian. It was a strange and rather sinister symbol that gave a slight feeling of discomfort on close inspection. Though he had retired from the practise of magic, Messer Lorenzo was still a rather discomforting man.

Long shelves lined the walls in the tapestried room, shelves stocked with a vast and disorderly array of phials and flasks, of coffers and chests, of retorts and crucibles, of strange bronze instruments for reading the stars and innumerable musty manuscripts. All the gear that had been essential to the magic of Sextus Sapientus was here, and all the adjuncts of that alchemy into which the mage now delved. Dust was thick on all things save those that had been recently used, for none of the servants ever entered this room. In fact, a lackey discharged from service at the Villa Sequestra swore that he had heard Messer Lorenzo converse on the friendliest terms with his Satanic majesty in that very cabinet. The smell of brimstone had pervaded the house for a sevennight thereafter, said the lackey.

In one dim corner of the room a charcoal fire smoldered under a glass retort, the squat body of which glowed redly like the distended belly of a gigantic spider. A dark liquid simmered in the retort, and at intervals a drop fell from the end of the long neck into a waiting beaker. Evil things were spoken of those brews of Messer Lorenzo, and it was even hinted that—for a price—he would temporarily forget his resolutions to deal no more in magic.

Across the room was another spot of color where a second brazier of charcoal burned redly under a small crucible supported on a triangle. A lanthorn hung beside it and a prism concentrated the rays of this last and flung them through a purple screen down on to the shining substance that gleamed within the crucible. The mage had certain theories relative to the beneficent effect of colored light upon the process of transmuting metals.

On a small table by the door stood the most prized of the few artistic treasures the mage had collected—a tall vase of the finest celadon ware. Graceful and fragile, delicate and possessed of rare beauty, it had been given in gratitude for certain services by one too high-born to be mentioned. It was kept in this chamber lest one of the house lackeys break it.

THERE was no sound in the room except for the faint bubbling liquid in the retort and the scratching of Messer Lorenzo's quill as it traveled over the parchment, and then light footsteps sounded in the hall. The door swung open and a woman entered.

Young she was, and comely, with

her dark hair held in a jeweled net and her slim waist circled by a broad and richly ornamented girdle. Her scarlet dress seemed to illuminate the chamber with a radiance of its own, yet yielded nothing in warmth to the soft whiteness of the bosom it left revealed. Less than a third the age of her learned spouse was Donna Beatriz Fiorelli and as full of the joy of life as he was old and sere. She had been accounted the most beautiful of all the maidens of her native hamlet, but she had possessed no dowry and her parents had welcomed a marriage to the wealthy if somewhat antique alchemist. For Messer Lorenzo had decided that a wife was needed to ease his declining years.

"Messire!" said Donna Beatriz from the doorway, and then sighed. Her lord's hearing had grown far worse since they had been wed, until now he was as deaf as the bronze image that squatted on the table beside him. With a slight shudder—for this room always affected her unpleasantly—Donna Beatriz crossed the thick carpet with her lithe, quick tread and laid her hand on his shoulder. He looked up with that slight start common to the deaf.

"A woman called Fulvia who keeps a wine shop in the city is without and desirous of seeing you."

Messer Lorenzo had become adept at the reading of lips and could thus understand the speech of one directly before him. He now made an impatient gesture of one thin, bony hand.

"What does the woman want?" he said in his cracked voice which was void of all intonation.

"It seems that she has a child—a son—who has been stricken with some inflammation of the bowels and is near to death. She desires some remedy of you."

Messer Lorenzo looked longingly at the fair sheet of parchment upon which he had been writing and ran his thumb along the edge of his quill as though testing a knife.

"Let her go to some chirurgeon in the city," he said impatiently. "I have no time for such trifles."

Donna Beatriz shrugged her slender shoulders; it was clearly to be seen that the life or death of an unknown boy was of little moment to her.

"I suppose it was your great repute that brought her." She started to turn away but he stopped her with a gesture.

"Tell the woman to catch a rat alive, split its paunch open, and place it across the boy's belly with its head to the right—this last is important. The rat is naturally foul, and will draw into itself all the foulness of the disease."

The mage returned to his writing and Donna Beatriz carried the message to the woman Fulvia. She then passed out into the broad gardens which circled the villa, pacing the lawns and hedge-bordered walks with the slow tread of one who thinks on weighty matters. Her scarlet dress was a brilliant spot of color against the green of the hedges, and the jewels on her girdle sparkled in the sun. By a miniature lake upon the glassy surface of which two snowy swans floated in joyful revery she paused to watch the approach of one who quickened his stride when he saw her.

It was Messer Nicolo d'Urvanti who traversed the gardens with so sure a step, he who was secretary to the mage. Lithe and debonair, it is small wonder that the secluded Donna Beatriz found pleasure in his company. An adverse critic might have said that Ser Nicolo's eyes were a trifle too close together and that his mouth was not that of one who is to be greatly trusted, but then—the sages have often warned against hasty judgments.

Something quick and eager about his stride warned her, and Beatriz held up a restraining hand.

"Take care, Nicolo; remember that

the window of my lord's chamber looks upon this part of the garden."

With all due dignity he paced at her side until they reached a secluded bower across the garden. The next instant she was in his arms, her head thrown back, her lips eager, her eyes half closed, her hair slipping from its nest and forming a sable mantle across her shoulders. From the alacrity with which Messer Nicolo took advantage of this condition it was manifestly not the first incident of the sort. However, it is scarcely just to think too harshly of the lady. She had seen but little of life, and this Ser Nicolo was a master of the *ars seducta*.

WHEN the sun was an hour lower Nicolo stood in the laboratory aiding his master in an experiment. Donna Beatriz appeared in the door and paused on the threshold, noting how the glow of the charcoal illumined the intent faces of the two men. For an instant the hand of the younger lingered in the beam of light that focused on the crucible—in the weird purple radiance it was like the hand of a corpse. Beatriz shuddered, and moved across the room to take a seat in the high-backed chair close to the casement. Finally the mage grunted and straightened up.

"It fails again, Nicolo, it fails again! There must be some subtle ingredient or some delicate process that we yet lack."

"Without doubt," answered the other, and then as Messer Lorenzo faced about and walked across the room Nicolo turned swiftly to Donna Beatriz. "In but a little while, my well beloved!" he said in a low voice.

"In but a little while!" she whispered back. Yet there was no need of whispering, for so deaf was Messer Lorenzo that he could not hear a single word. Much of the early lovemaking of these two had taken place in the mage's presence in this very manner. Then he turned back to them, and they fell silent lest he read their lips.

"The experiment is ended for today, Nicolo, and I will no longer keep you." The secretary bowed, but as the lady rose the mage added: "But you, Madonna, remain." She and Ser Nicolo exchanged a single glance, and then the latter bowed again and departed.

MESSER LORENZO took the seat across the table from his spouse, resting his clasped hands before him. The skin of his hands was wrinkled and yellowed and the fingers were gnarled and thin, but she knew that their weakness was deceptive and that they held great strength. Her arms still bore bruises from the intensity of his grip when she had stumbled at his side a few days back and he had caught her from falling.

His pale eyes were fixed on her with a steady, unwinking gaze that she found most discomforting. She looked out the window, she strove to appear at ease, but the power of the man ever drew her gaze back to him and she felt that she was unaccountably pale. Suddenly he smote one hand on the table as though reaching a conclusion, then rose to his feet.

"There are things I will show you," he said, and walked over to one of the shelves in the dimmest corner. The tension was broken and Beatriz felt the color return to her cheeks. For an instant she pressed her palms to her eyes.

From the shadows of that far corner Messer Lorenzo brought out a coffer that the donna had never seen before, a bronze casket green with mold and thick with the dust of years. Setting it upon the table and resuming his seat he fingered the carving on the side, seeking some secret spring. As last he threw back the cover. The hinges squeaked like a trapped rat and a musty smell arose from within.

From the casket the mage took out an object wrapped in black velvet.

Placing it on the table between them he gently removed the shielding folds of the cloth and revealed a dagger, a long, keen blade of some strange metal that shone blue in the light from the casement. Intricate, cabalistic designs were lightly traced on both sides of the thin blade, but it was at the curiously shaped gold hilt that Donna Beatriz looked longest. The symbols and designs on that hilt were similar to but even more disquieting than the pendant that Messer Lorenzo wore around his neck, and with a slight shudder she raised her darkling eyes.

"What is it, Messire?"

"It is the dagger of Hassan Sabbah," he answered slowly, "he who is called the Old Man of Mt. Alamout. You will note the peculiar color of the blade, Madonna, and the strangeness of the hilt. Tradition has it that this blade is forged of a metal hitherto unknown to man and has the peculiarity of warning its owner of treachery."

Secure though she was in the knowledge that he could suspect nothing, Donna Beatriz paled slightly. Then she essayed to laugh.

"A quaint conceit! How came you by it?"

"It has been in my possession for some time," and he laid the knife on one end of the table. "Now there is one matter more," and he began to search among the great mass of varied articles contained in the coffer. All were thick with dust and he threw open the window to clear the air.

At last he pushed aside some moldy wrappings and drew out a necklace, a string of wondrous rubies that filled even that dim chamber with the charm of their latent fire. Donna Beatriz uttered a gasp of admiration and the mage shot her a single keen glance.

" 'Tis the ancient and sacred necklace of the Amerites," he said. "There is magic in it. And it may only be worn safely by the most chaste of virgins or the most faithful of wives. Take it, my love."

Now Donna Beatriz thought little of magic or portents, being of a practical turn of mind. She had been in no way troubled by the mage's claim for that blue-bladed dagger, and she now clasped the necklace around her slender throat without a tremor, but her lord's manner puzzled her. He was also a little disturbing, though she could not tell exactly what it was about him that troubled her. He was again rummaging in the casket when suddenly the door of the room opened.

Nicolo d'Urvanti, booted and spurred, stood in the doorway with his cloak over his arm. Donna Beatriz cast a swift look at her lord to make sure that he still sat with his back to the door, and then smiled at her lover.

"I have two horses saddled and ready at the eastern end of the garden," he said.

Scarce moving her lips she replied, "Await me at the bower of the faun. I will soon come."

Ser Nicolo nodded and turned to go, and as he passed through the door a sudden vagrant gust of wind came in the open casement and swept his cloak in a fluttering arc so that it knocked the celadon vase from its stand and sent it crashing to the floor where it shattered into iridescent fragments. Donna Beatriz gasped, and the mage started so that he dropped the bunch of keys he held.

QUIET returned to the laboratory when Nicolo was gone, and Messer Lorenzo continued to burrow among the odd miscellany contained in the casket, but the woman sat staring at him with all trace of color gone from her face and her hands tight-clenched on the carven arms of her chair. He had jumped when the vase fell to the floor. He had *heard* it fall and break, and if he had heard *that*, then what else might not have reached his ears? What other things

that might not have shattered his iron control, as did the sudden loss of his beloved vase? His pretended absorption in the articles in the coffer did not fool her—it only increased her fear. If his hearing had but just returned he would have remarked it. The fact that he continued the pretense convinced her that he had heard many other things. Like the slow advance of a tide came the conviction that this deafness of Messer Lorenzo had all been feigned from the very first, had been but a trap, and she began to tremble from head to foot with paralyzing terror.

One thought was uppermost in the mind of Donna Beatriz—she must in some way escape from this ghastly chamber and warn Nicolo, who was waiting at the end of the garden. The belief that Lorenzo still thought his mask unpierced sustained her, and with a mighty effort she surmounted her fear—blind and unreasoning and therefore all the more powerful—and arose. The mage did not look up, and with every appearance of casualness Donna Beatriz passed from the room—with her body bathed in a chill moisture and her face like that of one who has seen a phantom. If he had spoken or called as she went her control would doubtless have failed her, but he seemed oblivious to her going.

Down the hall and the stairs and out through the portal of the house itself she held her way, walking swiftly but fearing to appear too hasty. Her spirits lifted a little as she went. Immediate flight was their only course, but at least they might easily put many leagues behind them ere the act was discovered.

Then Donna Beatriz stood in the garden itself, fragrant and pleasant, with the slanting rays of the late afternoon sun throwing long shadows across the smooth greensward. On her left was a long hedge, a mighty wall of green that extended unbroken the full length of the garden to the bower of the faun at the end. As she walked beside this hedge her new-found courage left her and swift terror again returned, though the garden seemed deserted and peaceful. It was more than fear this time, for it verged on certainty that something—some horror she was powerless to prevent—was about to happen. Faster and faster went her flying feet, till at last she picked up her long skirts lest they trip her and began to run, flitting along close to the hedge like some graceful bird of scarlet plumage.

No one was in sight, but as she ran Donna Beatriz felt a growing conviction that she was not alone. On a sudden thought she bent down and peered through the hedge at the base where the trunks of the bushes made this possible. On the other side of the long barrier, paralleling her course and a few paces ahead, she could see the legs of a man in black—the legs of one who ran with a certain relentless purpose embodied in every movement.

Stark panic gripped her then and she ran like a hunted wild thing, with the hot breath hissing between her parted lips. Perhaps twenty yards from the end she twisted her foot and fell, rolling over on the grass and leaping to her feet immediately though one ankle pained like the sear of a flame.

The delay was but a few seconds, yet she knew that the race was lost. Her eyes grew dull, and even the fact that she knew what she must find did not keep her slender body from sagging as she passed the end of the long hedge and came to the bower of the faun.

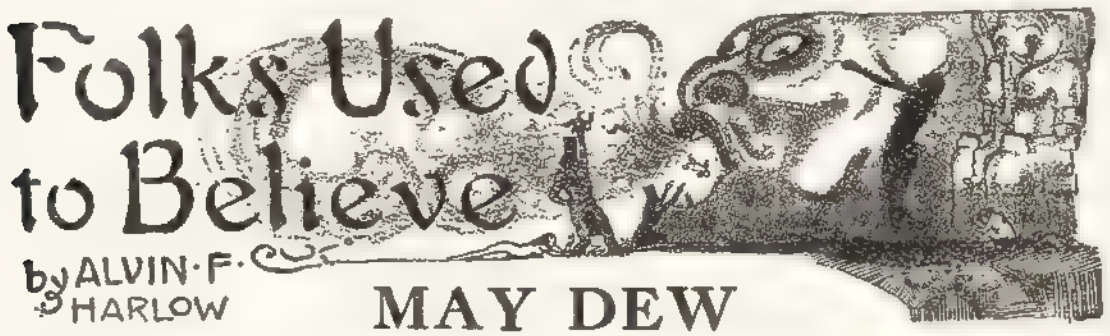
A cool cup of greenery it was, with the dark encircling mass of another hedge behind it and the marble faun on its pedestal in the center. The level rays of the sinking sun tinged the head and shoulders of the faun with a ruddy light which seemed to give life to the old marble, but the rest of the bower was bathed in a

soft twilight. On the damp grass at the base of the statue, one hand still quivering but in all other respects as peaceful as though he slept, lay the lifeless body of Nicolo d'Urvanti.

Messer Lorenzo was standing a little to one side, toying with the chain at his neck.

"Ah, Madonna," he said slowly, "you come too late. Ser Nicolo will break no more vases—nor rules of honor."

Through some chink in the surrounding hedge came a lone, vagrant ray of the sun that struck redly on the gold hilt of the dagger buried in the slain man's heart—a hilt of a strange and discomforting design with a glimpse of blue metal below it.



MAY DEW

THE joyous celebration of May Day can be traced back to the Roman Floralia, a spring festival of flowers. Then the Goths and other northern barbaric races had a similar festival of rejoicing over the departure of winter. The Queen of the May was simply a modern prototype of the Roman goddess Flora, and the maypole dance and other festivities of the day were reminders of early pagan rites which were far less decorous than they became later.

In England even as late as the Sixteenth Century, people often spent the whole night previous to May Day frolicking in the woods (perhaps in more or less conscious imitation of the witches who were holding their "sabbath" at the same time) and bringing home flowers and boughs.

Along some of the estuaries in Scotland where salmon fishing is carried on, a man goes across the river before daybreak on May Day, for if a female crossed first, the salmon would not come up into the river that season, and the fishing would be ruined.

Throughout Europe it was believed that if a maiden washed herself with dew gathered from the hawthorn at daybreak on every May Day, her beauty would never fade. We read in 1515 of Catherine of Aragon, first wife of Henry VIII, going out with twenty-five of her ladies after May dew. In 1623 there is a record of the Spanish Infanta Maria doing the same thing while Prince Charles of England, afterward Charles I, was paying his addresses to her.

In the *London Morning Post* for May 2, 1791, we read, "Yesterday being the first of May, according to annual and superstitious custom, a number of persons went into the fields and bathed their faces with the dew, under the idea that it would make them beautiful."

In Pepy's *Diary* in May, 1667, we find, "My wife away down with Jane and W. Hewer to Woolwich, in order to a little ayre and to lie there tomorrow, and so to gather May dew tomorrow morning, which Mrs. Turner hath taught her is the only thing in the world to wash her face with; and I am contented with it."

A Short, Strange Tale of the Sea

Left by the Tide

By EDWARD E. SCHIFF

WERE it not for that four-inch scar upon my forehead, I would have thought it a nightmare—some ghastly hallucination, even though it happened in broad daylight. But there is that scar, which mars my features for life, tangible and terrible evidence to prove that I did not dream it.

I had gone down to the beach with the rising sun, but I was the only one there. None of the other guests from the hotel had yet come down to take their early morning plunge. A charity affair that did not break up till 3 o'clock that morning kept them abed. So I was alone upon that sun-drenched stretch of sand.

The tide was low and I had to walk some hundred yards before I was waist-deep and breasting the invigorating waters of old ocean. I swam out at once to a pile of rocks, a good quarter of a mile from the shore, and climbed out upon them. Now, at low tide, they formed a nearly circular, barnacle- and weed-covered island, about fifty feet in diameter and rising only a few feet above the waters. After resting a few minutes I clambered over the jagged stones toward the center, where there was a depression about six or seven feet deep and about the same width, and where the retreating waters sometimes left strange denizens of the deep, which could be observed under ideal conditions.

Just before I reached the little pool, I thrilled to the sound of a splash of a heavy body. The tide had left something there with a vengeance, I thought gleefully, and I hastened forward to see what it was.

I stared, sickened by what I saw—a dead man, with shriveled, shrunken skin, hollow cheeks, and hideous in apparently the last stages of putrefaction. There he was floating on his back a bare few inches below the surface. His hands were under him, and at first I thought he was naked. Then, as I overcame my first horror, I noted that he had a sort of apron about his loins—an apron made of what appeared to be the scales of a large fish. It was a curious garment and covered with green algæ or sea moss. The man must have been dead a long time to have allowed for the formation of that slime. I puzzled over this, wondering how it was he remained whole and not half devoured by the scavengers of the sea. Then suddenly I remembered the splash I had heard. Who had made it? Not the dead man. Closely I searched the pool for some other sign of life, but except for a sea crab or two there was none.

Turning my attention to the body again, I scrutinized it closely and felt my scalp twitch when I thought I detected a barely perceptible rising and falling of the chest. The more I stared the more certain I was that I was not mistaken. But drowned men do not breathe, I told myself; I must be laboring under a hallucination. I turned my eyes away and gazed out over the sea and sky to rest them, and when I turned them back again I was shocked into an exclamation. The body had moved toward me. I could

still see the faint traces of the eddy it had made to reach me. But dead men can not move and there was no wave or tide or any breath of wind that could propel it within that enclosed space.

Now I was certain it was breathing. The slight but definitely regular expansion and contraction of the chest were caused by respiration. I could not be mistaken.

Then suddenly the lids flashed open and I was staring into its eyes. And they were the eyes of a living creature, sea-green and evil, that probed through mine into the very recesses of my brain with satanic curiosity. Then, still holding me with its baleful gaze, the thing reached for the brink with huge hands that were webbed like those of some aquatic bird, and started to pull itself up.

Somehow I broke the spell by which the thing held me, and, half mad with loathing and horror, I kicked him with my bare foot back into the pool.

I think I stumbled half back to the open water before I recovered my courage and paused to look back. It had come out of the pool and was dragging its slimy length over the rocks toward me. I realized at once it could not walk upright and that I would have no difficulty in evading it. With unmitigated loathing I watched it crawl until it approached to within a few feet of me. Then I backed away from it, taking care to avoid being crowded into the sea where it could easily outmaneuver me with its finlike appendages.

Again it tried to hold me with its hypnotic stare, but I avoided its eyes, and, stooping down, picked up a fragment of rock and tried to threaten it back. Suddenly it, too, reached out and picked up a stone, and we both threw at the same moment. But I was completely beside myself with horror and missed him by inches, while he caught me fairly on the chest —a blow that knocked the breath out of me and dropped me to my knees. The next moment he was upon me, his powerful hands closing about my throat, his cold, slimy body against my cringing, warm flesh, his fetid breath in my nostrils.

But I fought, fought in a stark, frenzied madness that promised to rid me of his clinging, hateful weight, when suddenly he released one of his hands from my throat, and I could feel him fumble around his waist. The next moment I would have been free of him, but his hand came up again wielding a stone or coral knife.

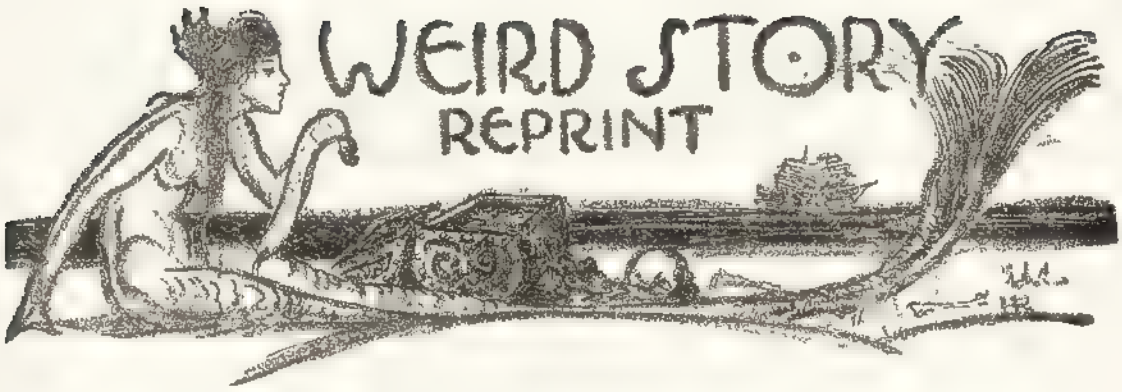
I screamed and tried to evade the blow, but while I spoiled his aim for my throat he managed to inflict that awful gash on my forehead.

When I came back to consciousness it was with a cry of terror, in the arms of two men who were lifting me into a skiff; and for some minutes I struggled with them, before I realized they were my rescuers.

Their story is briefly told. They had observed me from the beach apparently trying to avoid some creature which they thought was a seal. They quickly got into a skiff and rowed to the rocks, shouting to frighten off the creature when they saw me struggling with it. Then for a minute or two I was out of their sight, hidden by a projecting rock, and when they again saw me I was alone and lying flat on my back, though a moment before they had heard the thing splash into the sea.

That is their story. Mine they would not believe. In fact, they tried to stop me in the telling of it, and attempted to soothe me as if I were a terror-stricken child, or crazy. They said I had injured my forehead by falling on a jagged stone.

But that day two bathers were pulled down to their death by some creature of the sea. Sharks, they all said. But I know better.



*The Phantom Farmhouse**

By SEABURY QUINN

I HAD been at the new Briarcliff Sanitarium nearly three weeks before I actually saw the house.

Every morning as I lay abed after the nurse had taken my temperature, I wondered what was beyond the copse of fir and spruce at the turn of the road. The picture seemed incomplete without chimneys rising among the evergreens. I thought about it so much I finally convinced myself there really was a house in the wood—a house where people lived and worked and were happy.

All during the long, trying days when I was learning to navigate a wheel-chair, I used to picture the house and the people who lived in it. There would be a father, I was sure; a stout, good-natured father, somewhat bald, who sat on the porch and smoked a cob pipe in the evening. And there was a mother, too—a waistless, plaid-skirted mother with hair smoothly parted over her forehead, who sat beside the father as he rocked and smoked, and who had a brown work-basket in her lap. She spread the stocking feet over her outstretched fingers and her vigilant needle spied out and closed every hole with a cunning no mechanical loom could rival.

Then there was a daughter. I was a little hazy in my conception of her; but I knew she was tall and slender as a hazel wand, and that her eyes were blue and wide and sympathetic.

Picturing the house and its people became a favorite pastime with me during the time I was acquiring the art of walking all over again. By the time I was able to trust my legs on the road I felt I knew my way to my vision-friends' home as well as I knew the byways of my own parish; though I had as yet not set foot outside the sanitarium.

Oddly enough, I chose the evening for my first long stroll. It was unusually warm for September in Maine, and some of the sturdier of the convalescents had been playing tennis during the afternoon. After dinner they sat on the veranda, comparing notes on their respective cases of influenza, or matching experiences in appendicitis operations.

After building the house bit by bit from my imagination, as a child pieces together a picture puzzle, I should have been bitterly disappointed if the woods had proved empty; yet when I reached the turn

*From WEIRD TALES, October, 1923.

of the road and found my dream house a reality, I was almost afraid. Bit for bit and part for part, it was as I had visualized it.

A long, rambling, comfortable-looking farmhouse it was, with a wide porch screened by vines, and a whitewashed picket fence about the little clearing before it. There was a tumbledown gate in the fence, one of the kind that is held shut with a weighted chain. Looking closely, I saw the weight was a disused plowshare. Leading from gate to porch was a path of flat stones, laid unevenly in the short grass, and bordered with a double row of clam shells. A lamp burned in the front room, sending out cheerful golden rays to meet the silver moonlight.

A strange, eery sensation came over me as I stood there. Somehow, I felt I had seen that house before—many, many times before; yet I had never been in that part of Maine till I came to Briarcliff, nor had anyone ever described the place to me. Indeed, except for my idle dreams, I had had no intimation that there was a house in those pines at all.

"WHO lives in the house at the turn of the road?" I asked the fat man who roomed next to me.

He looked at me as blankly as if I had addressed him in Choctaw, then countered, "What road?"

"Why, the south road," I explained. "I mean the house in the pines—just beyond the curve, you know."

If such a thing had not been obviously absurd, I should have thought he looked frightened at my answer. Certainly his already prominent eyes started a bit further from his face.

"Nobody lives there," he assured me. "Nobody's lived there for years. There isn't any house there."

I became angry. What right had this fellow to make my civil question the occasion for an ill-timed jest? "As you please," I replied. "Perhaps there isn't any house there for *you;* but I saw one there last night."

"My God!" he ejaculated, and hurried away as if I'd just told him I was infected with smallpox.

Later in the day I overheard a snatch of conversation between him and one of his acquaintances in the lounge.

"I tell you it's so," he was saying with great earnestness. "I thought it was all a lot of poppycock, myself; but that clergyman saw it last night. I'm going to pack my traps and get back to the city, and not waste any time about it, either."

"Rats!" his companion scoffed. "He must have been stringing you."

Turning to light a cigar, he caught sight of me. "Say, Mr. Weatherby," he called, "you didn't mean to tell my friend here that you really saw a house down by those pines last night, did you?"

"I certainly did," I answered, "and I tell you, too. There's nothing unusual about it, is there?"

"Is there?" he repeated. "*Is* there? Say, what'd it look like?"

I described it to him as well as I could, and his eyes grew as wide as those of a child hearing the story of Bluebeard.

"Well, I'll be a Chinaman's uncle!" he declared as I finished. "I sure will!"

"See here," I demanded. "What's all the mystery about that farmhouse? Why shouldn't I see it? It's there to be seen, isn't it?"

He gulped once or twice, as if there were something hot in his mouth, before he answered:

"Look here, Mr. Weatherby, I'm telling you this for your own good. You'd better stay in o' nights; and you'd better stay away from those pines in particular."

Nonplussed at this unsolicited advice, I was about to ask an explanation, when I detected the after-tang of whisky on his breath. I understood, then. I was being made the

butt of a drunken joke by a pair of race-course followers.

"I'm very much obliged, I'm sure," I replied with dignity, "but if you don't mind, I'll choose my own comings and goings."

"Oh, go as far as you like"—he waved his arms wide in token of my complete free-agency—"go as far as you like. I'm going to New York."

And he did. The pair of them left the sanitarium that afternoon.

A SLIGHT recurrence of my illness held me housebound for several days after my conversation with the two sportively inclined gentlemen, and the next time I ventured out at night the moon had waxed to the full, pouring a flood of light upon the earth that rivaled midday. The minutest objects were as readily distinguished as they would have been before sunset; in fact, I remember comparing the evening to a silver-plated noon.

As I trudged along the road to the pine copse I was busy formulating plans for intruding into the family circle at the farmhouse; devising all manner of pious frauds by which to scrape acquaintance.

"Shall I feign having lost my way, and inquire direction to the sanitarium; or shall I ask if some mythical acquaintance, a John Squires, for instance, lives there?" I asked myself as I neared the turn of the road.

Fortunately for my conscience, all these subterfuges were unnecessary, for as I neared the whitewashed fence, a girl left the porch and walked quickly to the gate, where she stood gazing pensively along the moonlit road. It was almost as if she were coming to meet me, I thought, as I slackened my pace and assumed an air of deliberate casualness.

Almost abreast of her, I lowered my cadence still more, and looked directly at her. Then I knew why my conception of the girl who lived in that house had been misty and indistinct. For the same reason the venerable John had faltered in his description of the New Jerusalem until his vision of the Isle of Patmos.

From the smoothly parted hair above her wide, forget-me-not eyes, to the hem of her white cotton frock, she was as slender and lovely as a Rossetti saint; as wonderful to the eye as a mediæval poet's vision of his lost love in paradise. Her forehead, evenly framed in the beaten bronze of her hair, was wide and high, and startlingly white, and her brows were delicately penciled as if laid on by an artist with a camel's-hair brush. The eyes themselves were sweet and clear as forest pools mirroring the September sky, and lifted a little at the corners, like an Oriental's, giving her face a quaint, exotic look in the midst of these Maine woods.

So slender was her figure that the swell of her bosom was barely perceptible under the light stuff of her dress, and, as she stood immobile in the nimbus of moon rays, the undulation of the line from her shoulders to ankles was what painters call a "curve of motion."

One hand rested lightly on the gate, finely cut as a bit of Italian sculpture, and scarcely less white than the limed wood supporting it. I noticed idly that the forefinger was somewhat longer than its fellows, and that the nails were almond-shaped and very pink—almost red—as if they had been rouged and brightly polished.

No man can take stock of a woman thus, even in a cursory, fleeting glimpse, without her being aware of the inspection, and in the minute my eyes drank up her beauty, our glances crossed and held.

The look she gave back was as calm and unperturbed as though I had been non-existent; one might have thought I was an invisible wraith of the night; yet the faint suspicion of a flush quickening in her throat and cheeks told me she was neither un-

aware nor unappreciative of my scrutiny.

Mechanically, I raised my cap, and, wholly without conscious volition, I heard my own voice asking:

"May I trouble you for a drink from your well? I'm from the sanitarium—only a few days out of bed, in fact—and I fear I've overdone myself in my walk."

A smile flitted across her rather wide lips, quick and sympathetic as a mother's response to her child's request, as she swung the gate open for me.

"Surely," she answered, and her voice had all the sweetness of the south wind soughing through her native pines, "surely you may drink at our well, and rest yourself, too—if you wish."

She preceded me up the path, quickening her pace as she neared the house, and running nimbly up the steps to the porch. From where I stood beside the old-fashioned well, fitted with windlass and bucket, I could hear the sound of whispering voices in earnest conversation. Hers I recognized, lowered though it was, by the flutelike purling of its tones; the other two were deeper, and, it seemed to me, hoarse and throaty. Somehow, odd as it seemed, there was a queer, canine note in them, dimly reminding me of the muttering of not too friendly dogs—such fractious growls as I had heard while doing missionary duty in Alaska, when the savage, half-wolf malamutes were not fed promptly at the relay stations.

Her voice rose a thought higher, as if in argument, and I fancied I heard her whisper, "This one is mine, I tell you—mine. I'll brook no interference. Go to your own hunting."

An instant more and there was a reluctant assenting growl from the shadow of the vines curtaining the porch, and a light laugh from the girl as she descended the steps, swinging a bright tin cup in her hand. For a second she looked at me, as she sent the bucket plunging into the stone-curbed well; then she announced, in explanation:

"We're great hunters here, you know. The season is just in, and Dad and I have the worst quarrels about whose game is whose."

She laughed in recollection of their argument, and I laughed with her. I had been quite a Nimrod as a boy, myself, and well I remembered the heated controversies as to whose charge of shot was responsible for some luckless bunny's demise.

The well was very deep, and my breath was coming fast by the time I had helped her wind the bucket-rope upon the windlass; but the water was cold as only spring-fed well water can be. As she poured it from the bucket it shone almost like foam in the moonlight, and seemed to whisper with a half-human voice, instead of gurgling as other water does when poured.

I had drunk water in nearly every quarter of the globe, but never such water as that. Cold as the breath from a glacier, limpid as visualized air, it was yet so light and tasteless in substance that only the chill in my throat and the sight of the liquid in the cup told me I was doing more than going through the motions of drinking.

"And now, will you rest?" she invited, as I finished my third draft. "We've an extra chair on the porch for you."

Behind the screen of vines I found her father and mother seated in the rays of the big kitchen lamp. They were just as I had expected to find them—plain, homely, sincere country folk, courteous in their reception and anxious to make a sick stranger welcome. Both were stout, with the comfortable stoutness of middle age and good health; but both had surprizingly slender hands. I noticed, too, that the same characteristic of an over-long forefinger was apparent in their hands as in their daughter's.

and that the nails of both were trimmed to points and stained almost a brilliant red.

"My father, Mr. Squires," the girl introduced, "and my mother, Mrs. Squires."

I could not repress a start. These people bore the very name I had casually thought to use when inquiring for some imaginary person. My lucky stars had surely guided me away from that attempt to scrape an acquaintance. What a figure I should have cut if I had actually asked for Mr. Squires!

Though I was not aware of it, my curious glance must have stayed longer on their reddened nails than I had intended, for Mrs. Squires looked deprecatingly at her hands. "We've all been turning in, putting up fox-grapes"—she included her husband and daughter with a comprehensive gesture. "And the stain just won't wash out; has to wear off, you know."

I spent, perhaps, two hours with my new-found friends, talking of everything from the best methods of potato culture to the surest way of landing a nine-pound bass. All three joined in the conversation and took a lively interest in the topics under discussion. After the vapid talk of the guests at the sanitarium, I found the simple, interested discourse of these country people as stimulating as wine, and when I left them it was with a hearty promise to renew my call at an early date.

"Better wait until after dark," Mr. Squires warned. "We'd be glad to see you any time; but we're so busy these fall days, we haven't much time for company."

I took the broad hint in the same friendly spirit it was given.

It must have grown chillier than I realized while I sat there, for my new friends' hands were clay-cold when I took them in mine at parting.

Homeward bound, a whimsical thought struck me so suddenly I laughed aloud. There was something suggestive of the dog tribe about the Squires family, though I could not for the life of me say what it was. Even Mildred, the daughter, beautiful as she was, with her light eyes, her rather prominent nose and her somewhat wide mouth, reminded me in some vague way of a lovely silver collie I had owned as a boy.

I struck a tassel of dried leaves from a cluster of weeds with my walking-stick as I smiled at the fanciful conceit. The legend of the werewolves —those horrible monsters formed as men, but capable of assuming bestial shape at will, and killing and eating their fellows—was as old as mankind's fear of the dark, but no mythology I had ever read contained a reference to dog-people.

Strange fancies strike us in the moonlight sometimes.

SEPTEMBER ripened to October, and the moon, which had been as round and bright as an exchange-worn coin when I first visited the Squires house, waned as thin as a shaving from a silversmith's lathe.

I became a regular caller at the house in the pines. Indeed, I grew to look forward to my nightly visits with those homely folks as a welcome relief from the tediously gay companionship of the over-sophisticated people at the sanitarium.

My habit of slipping away shortly after dinner was the cause of considerable comment and no little speculation on the part of my fellow convalescents, some of whom set it down to the eccentricity which, to their minds, was the inevitable concomitant of a minister's vocation, while others were frankly curious. Snatches of conversation I overheard now and then led me to believe that the objective of my strolls was the subject of wagering, and the guarded questions put to me in an effort to solve the mystery became more and more annoying.

I had no intention of taking any of

them to the farmhouse with me. The Squires were my friends. Their cheerful talk and unassuming manners were as delightful a contrast to the atmosphere of the sanitarium as a breath of mountain balsam after the fetid air of a hothouse; but to the city-centered crowd at Briarcliff they would have been only the objects of less than half-scornful patronage, the source of pitying amusement.

It was Miss Leahy who pushed the impudent curiosity further than any of the rest, however. One evening, as I was setting out, she met me at the gate and announced her intention of going with me.

"You must have found something *dreadfully* attractive to take you off every evening this way, Mr. Weatherby," she hazarded as she pursed her rather pretty, rouged lips at me and caught step with my walk. "We girls really *can't* let some little country lass take you away from us, you know. We simply can't."

I made no reply. It was scarcely possible to tell a pretty girl, even such a vain little flirt as Sara Leahy, to go home and mind her business. Yet that was just what I wanted to do. But I would not take her with me; to that I made up my mind. I would stop at the turn of the road, just out of sight of the farmhouse, and cut across the fields. If she wanted to accompany me on a cross-country hike in high-heeled slippers, she was welcome to do so.

Besides, she would tell the others that my wanderings were nothing more mysterious than nocturnal explorations of the near-by woods; which bit of misinformation would satisfy the busybodies at Briarcliff and relieve me of the espionage to which I was subjected, as well.

I smiled grimly to myself as I pictured her climbing over fences and ditches in her flimsy party frock and beaded pumps, and lengthened my stride toward the woods at the road's turn.

We marched to the limits of the field bordering the Squires' grove in silence, I thinking of the mild revenge I should soon wreak upon the pretty little busybody at my side, Miss Leahy too intent on holding the pace I set to waste breath in conversation.

As we neared the woods she halted, an expression of worry, almost fear, coming over her face.

"I don't believe I'll go any farther," she announced.

"No?" I replied a trifle sarcastically. "And is your curiosity so easily satisfied?"

"It's not that"—she turned half round, as if to retrace her steps—"but I'm afraid of those woods."

"Indeed?" I queried. "And what is there to be afraid of? Bears, Indians, or wildcats? I've been through them several times without seeing anything terrifying." Now she had come this far, I was anxious to take her through the fields and underbrush.

"No-o," Miss Leahy answered, a nervous quaver in her voice, "I'm not afraid of anything like that; but —oh, I don't know what you call it. Pierre told me all about it the other day. Some kind of dreadful thing—loop—loop—something or other. It's a French word, and I can't remember it."

I was puzzled. Pierre Geronte was the ancient French-Canadian gardener at the sanitarium, and, like all doddering old men, would talk for hours to anyone who would listen. Also, like all *habitants*, he was full of the wild folklore his ancestors brought overseas with them generations ago.

"What did Pierre tell you?" I asked.

"Why, he said that years ago some terrible people lived in these woods. They had the only house for miles around, and travelers stopped there for the night, sometimes. But no stranger was ever seen to leave that place, once he went in. One night the farmers gathered about the house

and burned it, with the family that lived there. When the embers had cooled down they made a search, and found nearly a dozen bodies buried in the cellar. That was why no one ever came away from that dreadful place.

"They took the murdered men to the cemetery and buried them, but they dumped the charred bodies of the murderers into graves in the barnyard, without even saying a prayer over them. And Pierre says—oh, look! *Look!*"

She broke off her recital of the old fellow's story and pointed a trembling hand across the field to the edge of the woods. A second more and she shrank against me, clutching at my coat with fear-stiffened fingers and crying with excitement and terror.

I looked in the direction she indicated, myself a little startled by the abject fear that had taken such sudden hold on her.

Something white and ungainly was running diagonally across the field from us, skirting the margin of the woods and making for the meadow that adjoined the sanitarium pasture. A second glance told me it was a sheep, probably one of the flock kept to supply our table with fresh meat.

I was laughing at the strength of the superstition that could make the girl see a figure of horror in an innocent mutton that had strayed away from its fellows and was scared out of its silly wits, when something else attracted my attention.

Loping along in the trail of the fleeing sheep, somewhat to the rear and a little to each side, were two other animals. At first glance they appeared to be a pair of large collies; but as I looked more intently, I saw that these animals were like nothing I had ever seen before. They were much larger than any collie—nearly as high as St. Bernards—yet shaped in a general way like Alaskan sledge-dogs—huskies.

The farther one was considerably the larger of the two, and ran with a slight limp, as if one of its hind paws had been injured. As nearly as I could tell in the indifferent light, they were a rusty brown color, very thick-haired and unkempt in appearance. But the strangest thing about them was the fact that both were tailless, which gave them a terrifyingly grotesque look.

As they ran, a third form, similar to the other two in shape, but smaller, slender as a greyhound, with much lighter-hued fur, broke from the thicket of short brush edging the wood and took up the chase, emitting a series of short, sharp yelps.

"Sheep-killers," I murmured, half to myself. "Odd. I've never seen dogs like that before."

"They're not dogs," wailed Miss Leahy against my coat. "They're not dogs. Oh, Mr. Weatherby, let's go away. Please, please take me home!"

She was rapidly becoming hysterical, and I had a difficult time with her on the trip back. She clung whimpering to me, and I had almost to carry her most of the way. By the time we reached the sanitarium, she was crying bitterly, shivering as if with a chill, and went in without stopping to thank me for my assistance.

I turned and made for the Squires farm with all possible speed, hoping to get there before the family had gone to bed. But when I arrived the house was in darkness, and my knock at the door received no answer.

As I retraced my steps to the sanitarium I heard faintly, from the fields beyond the woods, the shrill, eery cry of the sheep-killing dogs.

A TORRENT of rain held us marooned the next day. Miss Leahy was confined to her room, with a nurse in constant attendance and the house doctor making hourly calls. She was on the verge of a nervous collapse, he told me, crying with a persistence that bordered on hysteria, and responded to treatment very slowly.

An impromptu dance was organized in the great hall and half a dozen bridge tables set up in the library; but as I was skilled in neither of these rainy day diversions, I put on a waterproof and patrolled the veranda for exercise.

On my third or fourth trip around the house I ran into old Geronte shuffling across the porch, wagging his head and muttering portentously to himself.

"See here, Pierre," I accosted him, "what sort of nonsense have you been telling Miss Leahy about those pine woods down the south road?"

The old fellow regarded me unwinkingly with his beady eyes, wrinkling his age-yellowed forehead for all the world like an elderly baboon inspecting a new sort of edible. "*M'sieur* goes out alone much at nights, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he asked, at length.

"Yes, *Monsieur* goes out alone much at night," I echoed, "but what *Monsieur* particularly desires to know is what sort of tales you have been telling Mademoiselle Leahy. *Comprenez vous?*"

The network of wrinkles about his lips multiplied as he smiled enigmatically, regarding me askance from the corners of his eyes.

"*M'sieur* is *Anglais,*" he replied. "He would not understand—or believe."

"Never mind what I'd believe," I retorted. "What is this story about murder and robbery being committed in those woods? Who were the murderers, and where did they live? *Hein?*"

For a few seconds he looked fixedly at me, chewing the cud of senility between his toothless gums; then, glancing carefully about, as if he feared being overheard, he tiptoed up to me and whispered:

"*M'sieur* mus' stay indoors these nights. W'en the moon, she shine, yes; w'en she not show her face, no. There are evil things abroad at the dark of the moon, *M'sieur*. Even las' night they keel t'ree of my bes' sheep. Remembair, *M'sieur*, the *loup-garou*, he is out when the moon hide her light."

And with that he turned and left me; nor could I get another word from him save his cryptic warning, "Remembair, *M'sieur*, the *loup-garou*. Remembair."

In spite of my annoyance, I could not get rid of the unpleasant sensation the old man's words left with me. "The *loup-garou* — werewolf" — he had said, and to prove his goblin-wolf's presence, he had cited the death of his three sheep.

As I paced the rain-washed porch I thought of the scene I had witnessed the night before, when the sheep-killers were at their work.

"Well," I reflected, "I've seen the *loup-garou* on his native heath at last. From causes as slight as this, no doubt, the horrible legend of the werewolf had sprung. Time was when all France quaked at the sound of the *loup-garou's* hunting-call and the bravest knights in Christendom trembled in their castles and crossed themselves fearfully because some renegade shepherd dog quested his prey in the night. On such a foundation are the legends of a people built."

Whistling a snatch from *Pinafore* and looking skyward in search of a patch of blue in the clouds, I felt a tug at my raincoat sleeve, such as a neglected terrier might give. It was Geronte again.

"*M'sieur,*" he began in the same mysterious whisper, "the *loup-garou* is a verity, certainly. I, myself, have nevair seen him"—he paused to bless himself—"but my cousin, Baptiste, was once pursued by him. Yes.

"It was near the shrine of the good Sainte Anne that Baptiste lived. One night he was sent to fetch the curé for a dying woman. They rode fast through the trees, the curé and my cousin Baptiste, for it was at the dark of the moon, and the evil forest folk

were abroad. And as they galloped, there came a *loup-garou* from the woods, with eyes as bright as hell-fire. It followed hard, this tailless hound from the devil's kennel; but they reached the house before it, and the curé put his book, with the Holy Cross on its cover, at the doorstep. The *loup-garou* wailed under the windows like a child in pain until the sun rose; then it slunk back to the forest.

"When my cousin Baptiste and the curé came out, they found its hand marks in the soft earth around the door. Very like your hand, or mine, they were, *M'sieur*, save that the first finger was longer than the others."

"And did they find the *loup-garou?*" I asked, something of the old man's earnestness communicated to me.

"Yes, *M'sieur;* but of course," he replied gravely. "T'ree weeks before, a stranger, drowned in the river, had been buried without the office of the Church. W'en they opened his grave they found his fingernails as red as blood, and sharp. Then they knew. The good curé read the burial office over him, and the poor soul that had been snatched away in sin slept peacefully at last."

He looked quizzically at me, as if speculating whether to tell me more; then, apparently fearing I would laugh at his outburst of confidence, he started away toward the kitchen.

"Well, what else, Pierre?" I asked, feeling he had more to say.

"*Non, non, non,*" he replied. "There is nothing more, *M'sieur*. I did but want *M'sieur* should know my own cousin, Baptiste Geronte, had seen the *loup-garou* with his very eyes."

"Hearsay evidence," I commented, as I went in to dinner.

DURING the rainy week that followed I chafed at my confinement like a privileged convict suddenly deprived of his liberties, and looked as wistfully down the south road as any prisoned gipsy ever gazed upon the open trail.

The quiet home circle at the farmhouse, the unforced conversation of the old folks, Mildred's sweet companionship, all beckoned me with an almost irresistible force. For in this period of enforced separation I discovered what I had dimly suspected for some time — I loved Mildred Squires. And, loving her, I longed to tell her of it.

No lad intent on visiting his first sweetheart ever urged his feet more eagerly than I when, the curtains of rain at last drawn up, I hastened toward the house at the turn of the road.

As I hoped, yet hardly dared expect, Mildred was standing at the gate to meet me as I rounded the curve, and I yearned toward her like a humming-bird seeking its nest.

She must have read my heart in my eyes, for her greeting smile was as tender as a mother's as she bends above her babe.

"At last you have come, my friend," she said, putting out both hands in welcome. "I am very glad."

We walked silently up the path, her fingers still resting in mine, her face averted. At the steps she paused, a little embarrassment in her voice as she explained, "Father and Mother are out; they have gone to a—meeting. But you will stay?"

"Surely," I acquiesced. And to myself I admitted my gratitude for this chance of Mildred's unalloyed company.

We talked but little that night. Mildred was strangely distrait, and, much as I longed to, I could not force a confession of my love from my lips. Once, in the midst of a long pause between our words, the cry of the sheep-killers came faintly to us, echoed across the fields and woods, and as the weird, shrill sound fell on our ears she threw back her head with something of the gesture of a hunting dog scenting its quarry.

Toward midnight she turned to me, a panic of fear having apparently laid hold of her.

"You must go," she exclaimed, rising and laying her hand on my shoulder.

"But your father and mother have not returned," I objected. "Won't you let me stay until they get back?"

"Oh, no, no!" she answered, her agitation increasing. "You must go at once—please." She increased her pressure on my shoulder, almost as if to shove me from the porch.

Taken aback by her sudden desire to be rid of me, I was picking up my hat, when she uttered a stifled little scream and ran quickly to the edge of the porch, interposing herself between me and the yard. At the same moment I heard a muffled sound from the direction of the front gate, a sound like a growling and snarling of savage dogs.

I leaped forward, my first thought being that the sheep-killers I had seen the other night had strayed to the Squires place. Crazed with blood I knew they would be almost as dangerous to men as to sheep, and every nerve in my sickness-weakened body cried out to protect Mildred.

To my blank amazement, as I looked from the porch I beheld Mr. and Mrs. Squires walking sedately up the path, talking composedly together. There was no sign of the dogs or any other animals about.

As the elderly couple neared the porch I noticed that Mr. Squires walked with a pronounced limp, and that both their eyes shone very brightly in the moonlight, as though they were suffused with tears.

They greeted me pleasantly enough; but Mildred's anxiety seemed increased, rather than diminished, by their presence, and I took my leave after a brief exchange of civilities.

On my way back I looked intently in the woods bordering the road for some sign of the house of which Pierre had told Miss Leahy; but everywhere the pines grew as thickly as though neither ax nor fire had ever disturbed them.

"Geronte is in his second childhood," I reflected, "and like an elder child, he loves to terrify his juniors with fearsome witch-tales."

Yet an uncomfortable feeling was with me till I saw the gleam of the sanitarium's lights across the fields; and as I walked toward them it seemed to me that more than once I heard the baying of the sheep-killers in the woods behind me.

A BUZZ of conversation, like the sibilant arguments of a cloud of swarming bees, greeted me as I descended the stairs to breakfast next morning.

It appeared that Ned, one of the pair of great mastiffs attached to the sanitarium, had been found dead before his kennel, his throat and brisket torn open and several gaping wounds in his flanks. Boris, his fellow, had been discovered whimpering and trembling in the extreme corner of the dog house, the embodiment of canine terror.

Speculation as to the animal responsible for the outrage was rife, and, as usual, it ran the gamut of possible and impossible surmises. Every sort of beast from a grizzly bear to a lion escaped from the circus was in turn indicted for the crime, only to have a complete alibi straightway established.

The only one having no suggestion to offer was old Geronte, who stood sphinxlike in the outskirts of the crowd, smiling sardonically to himself and wagging his head sagely. As he caught sight of me he nodded sapiently, as if to include me in the joint tenancy to some weighty secret.

Presently he worked his way through the chattering group and whispered, "*M'sieur*, he was here last night—and with him was the other tailless one. Come and see."

Plucking me by the sleeve, he led me to the rear of the kennels, and, stooping, pointed to something in the moist earth. "You see?" he asked, as if a printed volume lay for my reading in the mud.

"I see that someone has been on his hands and knees here," I answered, inspecting the hand prints he indicated.

"*Something,*" he corrected, as if reasoning with an obstinate child. "Does not *M'sieur* behol' that the first finger is the longest?"

"Which proves nothing," I defended. "There are many hands like that."

"Oh—yes?" he replied with that queer upward accent of his. "And where has *M'sieur* seen hands like that before?"

"Oh, many times," I assured him somewhat vaguely, for there was a catch at the back of my throat as I spoke. Try as I would, I could recall only three pairs of hands with that peculiarity.

His little black eyes rested steadily on me in an unwinking stare, and the corners of his mouth curved upward in a malicious grin. It seemed, almost, as if he found a grim pleasure in thus driving me into a corner.

"See here, Pierre," I began testily, equally annoyed at myself and him, "you know as well as I that the *loup-garou* is an old woman's tale. Someone was looking here for tracks, and left his own while doing it. If we look among the patients here we shall undoubtedly find a pair of hands to match these prints."

"God forbid!" he exclaimed, crossing himself. "That would be an evil day for us, *M'sieur*.

"Here, Bor-ees," he snapped his fingers to the surviving mastiff, "come and eat."

The huge beast came wallowing over to him with the ungainly gait of all heavily muscled animals, stopping on his way to make a nasal investigation of my knees. Scarcely had his nose come into contact with my trousers when he leaped back, every hair in his mane and along his spine stiffly erect, every tooth in his great mouth bared in a savage snarl. But instead of the mastiff's fighting growl, he emitted only a low, frightened whine, as though he were facing some animal of greater power than himself, and knew his own weakness.

"Good heavens!" I cried, thoroughly terrified at the friendly brute's sudden hostility.

"Yes, *M'sieur,*" Geronte cut in quickly, putting his hand on the dog's collar and leading him a few paces away. "It is well you should call upon the heavenly ones; for surely you have the odor of hell upon your clothes."

"What do you mean?" I demanded angrily. "How dare you——?"

He raised a thin hand deprecatingly.

"*M'sieur* knows that he knows," he replied evenly, "and that I also know."

And leading Boris by the collar, he shuffled to the house.

MILDRED was waiting for me at the gate that evening, and again her father and mother were absent at one of their meetings.

We walked silently up the path and seated ourselves on the porch steps, where the waning moon cast oblique rays through the pine branches.

I think Mildred felt the tension I was drawn to, for she talked trivialities with an almost feverish earnestness, stringing her sentences together, and changing her subjects as a Navajo rug-weaver twists and breaks her threads.

At last I found an opening in the abattis of her small talk.

"Mildred," I said, very simply, for great emotions tear the ornaments from our speech, "I love you, and I want you for my wife. Will you marry me, Mildred?" I laid my hand on hers. It was cold as lifeless flesh,

and seemed to shrink beneath my touch.

"Surely, dear, you must have read the love in my eyes," I urged, as she averted her face in silence. "Almost from the night I first saw you, I've loved you, dear. I——"

"O-o-h, don't," her interruption was a strangled moan, as if wrung from her by my words.

I leaned nearer her. "Don't you love me, Mildred?" I asked. As yet she had not denied it.

For a moment she trembled, as if a sudden chill had come on her; then, leaning to me, she clasped my shoulders in her arms, hiding her face against my jacket.

"John, John, you don't know what you say," she whispered disjointedly, as though a sob had torn the words before they left her lips. Her breath was on my cheek, moist and cold as air from a vault.

I could feel the litheness of her through the thin stuff of her gown, and her body was as devoid of warmth as a dead thing.

"You're cold," I told her, putting my arms shieldingly about her. "The night has chilled you."

A convulsive sob was her only answer.

"Mildred," I began again, putting my hand beneath her chin and lifting her face to mine, "tell me, dear, what is the matter?" I lowered my lips to hers.

With a cry that was half scream, half weeping, she thrust me suddenly from her, pressing her hands against my breast and lowering her head until her face was hidden between her outstretched arms. I, too, started back, for in the instant our lips were about to meet, hers had writhed back from her teeth, like a dog's when he is about to spring, and a low, harsh noise, almost a growl, had risen in her throat.

"For God's sake," she whispered hoarsely, agony in every note of her shaking voice, "never do that again! Oh, my dear, dear love, you don't know how near to a horror worse than death you were."

"A — horror — worse — than — death?" I echoed dully, pressing her cold little hands in mine. "What do you mean, Mildred?"

"Loose my hands," she commanded with a quaint reversion to the speech of our ancestors, "and hear me. I do love you. I love you better than life, better than death. I love you so I have overcome something stronger than the walls of the grave for your sake; but John, my very love, this is our last night together. We can never meet again. You must go, now, and not come back until tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning?" I repeated blankly. What wild talk was this?

Heedless of my interruption, she hurried on. "Tomorrow morning, just before the sun rises over those trees, you must be here, and have your prayer-book with you."

I listened speechless, wondering which of us was mad.

"By that cornerib there," she waved a directing hand, "you will find three mounds. Stand beside them and read the office for the burial of the dead. Come quickly, and pause for nothing on the way. Look back for nothing; heed no sound from behind you. And for your own safety, come no sooner than to allow yourself the barest time to read your office."

Bewildered, I attempted to reason with the madwoman; begged her to explain this folly; but she refused all answer to my fervid queries, nor would she suffer me to touch her.

Finally, I rose to go. "You will do what I ask?" she implored.

"Certainly not," I answered firmly.

"John, John, have pity!" she cried, flinging herself to the earth before me and clasping my knees. "You say you love me. I only ask this one favor of you—only this. Please, for my sake, for the peace of the dead

and the safety of the living, promise you will do this thing for me."

Shaken by her abject supplication, I promised, though I felt myself a figure in some grotesque nightmare as I did it.

"Oh, my love, my precious love," she wept, rising and taking both my hands. "At last I shall have peace, and you shall bring it to me. No," she forbade as I made to take her in my arms at parting. "The most I can give you, dear, is this." She held her icy hands against my lips. "It seems so little, dear; but oh! it is so much."

Like a drunkard in his cups I staggered along the south road, my thoughts gone wild with the strangeness of the play I had just acted.

Across the clearing came the howls of the sheep-killers, a sound I had grown used to of late. But tonight there was a deeper, fiercer timbre in their bay, a note that boded ill for man as well as beast. Louder and louder it swelled; it was rising from the field itself, now, drawing nearer and nearer the road.

I turned and looked. The great beasts I had seen pursuing the luckless sheep the other night were galloping toward me. A cold finger seemed traced down my spine; the scalp crept and tingled beneath my cap. There was no other object of their quest in sight. I was their elected prey.

My first thought was to turn and run, but a second's reasoning told me this was worse than useless. Weakened with long illness, with an uphill road to the nearest shelter, I should soon be run down.

No friendly tree offered asylum; my only hope was to stand and fight. Grasping my stick, I spread my feet, bracing myself against their charge.

And as I waited their onslaught, there came from the shadow of the pines the shriller, sharper cry of the third beast. Like the crest of a flying, windlashed wave, the slighter, silver-furred brute came speeding across the meadow, its ears laid back, its slender paws spurning the sod daintily. Almost it seemed as if the pale shadow of a cloud were racing toward me.

The thing dashed slantwise across the field, its flight converging on the line of the other two's attack. Midway between me and them it paused, hairs bristling, limbs bent for a spring.

My eyes went wide with incredulity. It was standing in my defense.

All the savageness of the larger beasts' hunting-cry was echoed in the smaller creature's bay, and with it a defiance that needed no interpretation.

The attackers paused in their rush, halted, and looked speculatively at my ally. They took a few tentative steps in my direction, and a fierce whine, almost an articulate curse, went up from the silver-haired beast. Slowly the tawny pair circled and trotted back to the woods.

I hurried toward the sanitarium, grasping my stick firmly in readiness for another attack.

But no further cries came from the woods, and once, as I glanced back, I saw the light-haired beast trotting slowly in my wake, looking from right to left, as if to ward off danger.

Half an hour later I looked from my window toward the house in the pines. Far down the south road, its muzzle pointed to the moon, the bright-furred animal crouched and poured out a lament to the night. And its cry was like the wail of a child in pain.

FAR into the night I paced my room, like a condemned convict when the vigil of the death watch is on him. Reason and memory struggled for the mastery; one urging me to give over my wild act, the other bidding me obey my promise to Mildred.

Toward morning I dropped into a chair, exhausted with my objectless marching. I must have fallen asleep,

for when I started up the stars were dimming in the zenith, and bands of slate, shading to amethyst, slanted across the horizon.

A moment I paused, laughing cynically at my fool's errand; then, seizing cap and book, I bolted down the stairs, and ran through the paling dawn to the house in the pines.

There was something ominous and terrifying in the two-toned pastel of the house that morning. Its windows stared at me with blank malevolence, like the half-closed eyes of one stricken dead in mortal sin. The little patches of hoar-frost on the lawn were like leprous spots on some unclean thing. From the trees behind the clearing an owl hooted mournfully, as if to say, "Beware, beware!" and the wind soughing through the black pine boughs echoed the refrain ceaselessly.

Three mounds, sunken and weed-grown, lay in the unkempt thicket behind the corncrib. I paused beside them, throwing off my cap and adjusting my stole hastily. Thumbing the pages to the committal service, I held the book close, that I might see the print through the morning shadows, and commenced: "I know that my redeemer liveth. . ."

Almost beside me, under the branches of the pines, there rose such a chorus of howls and yelps I nearly dropped my book. Like all the hounds in the kennels of hell, the sheep-killers clamored at me, rage and fear and mortal hatred in their eyes. Through the bestial cadences, too, there seemed to run a human note—the sound of voices heard before beneath these very trees. Deep and throaty and raging mad two of the voices came to me, and, like the tremolo of a violin lightly played in an orchestra of brass, the shriller cry of a third beast sounded.

As the infernal hubbub rose at my back, I half turned to fly. Next instant I grasped my book more firmly and resumed my office; for, like a beacon in the dark, Mildred's words flashed on my memory: *"Look back for nothing; heed no sound behind you."*

Strangely, too, the din approached no nearer, but as though held by an invisible bar, stayed at the boundary of the clearing.

"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery . . . deliver us from all our offenses . . . O Lord, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death. . . ." and to such an accompaniment, surely, as no priest ever before chanted the office, I pressed through the brief service to the final amen.

Tiny gouts of moisture stood out on my forhead and my breath struggled in my throat as I gasped out the last word. My nerves were frayed to shreds and my strength nearly gone as I let fall my book and turned upon the beasts among the trees.

They were gone. Abruptly as it had begun, their clamor stopped, and only the rotting pine needles, lightly gilded by the morning sun, met my gaze. A light touch fell in the palm of my open hand, as if a pair of cool, sweet lips had laid a kiss there.

A vapor like swamp-fog enveloped me. The outbuildings, the old, stone-curbed well where I had drunk the night I first saw Mildred, the house itself—all seemed fading into mist and swirling away in the morning breeze.

"EH, EH, EH; but *M'sieur* will do himself an injury, sleeping on the wet earth!" Old Geronte bent over me, his arm beneath my shoulders. Behind him, great Boris, the mastiff, stood wagging his tail, regarding me with doggish good humor.

"Pierre," I muttered thickly, "how came you here?"

"This morning, going to my tasks, I saw *M'sieur* run down the road like a thing pursued. I followed quickly, for the woods hold terrors in the dark, *M'sieur*."

I looked toward the farmhouse. Only a pair of chimneys, rising stark and bare from a crumbling foundation, were there. Fence, well, barn—all were gone, and in their place was a thicket of sumac and briars, tangled and overgrown as though undisturbed for thirty years.

"The house, Pierre! Where is the house?" I croaked, sinking my fingers into his withered arm.

" 'ouse?" he echoed. "Oh, but of course! There is no 'ouse here, *M'sieur;* nor has there been for years. This is an evil place, *M'sieur;* it is best we quit it, and that quickly. There be evil things that run by night——"

"No more," I answered, staggering toward the road, leaning heavily on him. "I brought them peace, Pierre."

He looked dubiously at the English prayer book I held. A Protestant clergymen is a thing of doubtful usefulness to the orthodox French-Canadian. Something of the heart-sick misery in my face must have touched his kind old heart, for at last he relented, shaking his head pityingly and patting my shoulder gently, as one would soothe a sorrowing child.

"Per'aps, *M'sieur,*" he conceded. "Per'aps; who shall say no? Love and sorrow are the purchase price of peace. Yes. Did not *le bon Dieu* so buy the peace of the world?"

---

12. A Vision of the Future

I dreamed the waters of the world had dried;
  The ocean-beds were open, now, and free,
  And all strange things once covered by the sea
Lay everywhere, and slowly, vilely, died.
Here was a hulk, some bones, and there I spied
  Old, rotted things of ancient mystery,
  And slimy horrors that were yet to be,
And stone enormities no slime could hide.

I saw the monstrous caverns of the deep,
  I saw the dwellers of the ocean night,
    The graves, the relics of the curious dead;
And in the fading vision of the sleep,
  I saw a thing, vast, horrible, and white,
    That feebly moved its pulpy, eyeless head.

THE EYRIE

EVER since *The Moon Terror*—that vivid weird-scientific story by A. G. Birch which ran serially in early issues of WEIRD TALES—was brought out in book form, our readers have taken it for granted that sooner or later we would collect the Jules de Grandin stories of Seabury Quinn in a book; and you, the readers, have been urging the book-publication of the temperamental French occultist's adventures. Several readers have gone so far as to suggest a title for the book. The best of these suggested titles seems to be *The Phantom-Fighter;* another good one is *The Ghost-Breaker.* We welcome further suggestions; for the idea of making Jules de Grandin's stories from this magazine available in book form appeals to us. Meanwhile we shall print further adventures of the fascinating French phantom-fighter in WEIRD TALES. The next Jules de Grandin story will be *The Devil's Rosary.*

Writes Jack Snow, of Piqua, Ohio: "*The Copper Bowl,* by Captain George Fielding Eliot, is one of the most gripping stories that has appeared in the pages of WEIRD TALES for many months. It is excellent, and I am sure the readers would appreciate more of Captain Eliot's work."

Madella Risca, of Oakland, California, writes to The Eyrie: "Why do you not publish any more stories by Eli Colter? By chance I found two old copies of WEIRD TALES; one contained *The Last Horror* and one the story about the princess of two thousand years ago. I was enthralled by the sheer magnificence of *The Last Horror.* It is a truly wonderful mind that could put into the mouths of his characters the words he does. Please publish more of his stories." [This letter was written before the February issue, beginning Eli Colter's new serial, appeared on the news stands.—THE EDITOR.]

Howard S. Whiteside, of Boston, writes: "You choose excellently when you put Seabury Quinn's stories first in your magazine. He is the best of the many good writers in WEIRD TALES. *The Black Master* is, in my opinion, the best story of the January issue. There was a story printed some time ago in WEIRD TALES that I considered remarkable; it was called *The White Ship.* I suppose it is too recent to reprint as yet, but I think it would be very acceptable to your readers if you reprinted it in the future."

Writes Henry Kuttner, Jr., from Millbrae, California: "I have been an

ardent reader of your magazine, although I am only a high school student, ever since I became acquainted with it—which was, I believe, in an issue containing as a feature a story called *The Metal Giants,* by Edmond Hamilton. It was an excellent story, as are most of your others. My favorite fiction is horror and science stories, and WEIRD TALES fills a long-felt want."

C. Hampel, of Los Angeles, breaks into verse to describe his impression of what the WEIRD TALES office must be like:

"Home of a thousand horrors,
Birthplace of terror and gloom,
Playground of ghosts and demons
Is the WEIRD TALES editor's room.

"There are manuscripts reeking in weirdness,
Of humans harried to doom;
And the lore that is ancient, forgotten,
Is reborn in the editor's room.

"In the night, when the office is empty,
Inchoate shadows loom,
Twisting, gesturing, mouthing,
There in the editor's room.

"Evils from ancient Asia,
When Babylon was in bloom,
Lore from covered Atlantis
Are unleashed in the editor's room."

Howard A. McElroy writes from Hampton, Virginia, that the January issue is far below standard, "the worst yet," but he greatly enjoyed Kline's story, *The Demon of Tlaxpam,* and Quinn's *The Black Master.* "I think a book of Seabury Quinn's stories would go over big," he writes; "also Otis Adelbert Kline, Lovecraft and Howard. Why can't we have their best stories in book form?"

"After being a constant reader of your magazine for the past two years," writes R. L. Grantham, of Cainsville, "I thought I had better write in my opinion of some of your stories. I never cared much in the past for your monthly 'Weird Story Reprint,' which has been much discussed by other readers in The Eyrie. I think, though, that this month's reprint of Nictzin Dyalhis' story, *When the Green Star Waned,* from one of your previous issues will certainly create more interest to your readers than any new story. Let us have more stories from your early issues."

Writes R. E. Reed, of Lewistown, Pennsylvania: "Having read W. T. for several years and never having written you my opinion of it, I take the liberty of writing now. I like to read weird tales very much. But I don't see much any more of Nictzin Dyalhis' stories, except *The Oath of Hul Jok,*

(Continued on page 424)

FUTURE ISSUES

A WEALTH of fascinating stories is scheduled for early publication in WEIRD TALES, the unique magazine. The brilliant success of WEIRD TALES has been founded on its unrivaled, superb stories of the strange, the grotesque and the terrible—gripping stories that stimulate the imagination and send shivers of apprehension up the spine—tales that take the reader from the humdrum world about us into a deathless realm of fancy—marvelous tales so thrillingly told that they seem very real. WEIRD TALES prints the best weird fiction in the world today. If Poe were alive he would undoubtedly be a contributor. In addition to creepy mystery stories, ghost-tales, stories of devil-worship, witchcraft, vampires and strange monsters, this magazine also prints the cream of the weird-scientific fiction that is written today—tales of the spaces between the worlds, surgical stories, and stories that scan the future with the eye of prophecy. Among the amazing tales in the next few issues will be:

THE THING IN THE HOUSE, *by H. F. Scotten*

A combination of de Maupassant's "Horla," Bierce's "Damned Thing" and Crawford's invisible creature in "The Upper Berth," this fearsome monster wrought dreadful havoc before it was brought to bay.

WITHIN THE NEBULA, *by Edmond Hamilton*

Three beings from different corners of the Galaxy—an Earth-man from our own solar system, a plant-man from Capella, and a tentacle-man from Arcturus—start out on the strangest expedition in all literature as the great nebula expands and menaces the universe with fiery destruction.

UP IRRIWADDY WAY, *by Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner*

A strange and thrilling tale of a great idol with its ghastly death-trap—a theft of sacred rubies—a weird story of man-eating plants and giant blue fungus growths that attack human beings.

IN A DEAD MAN'S SHOES, *by Harold Markham*

A story of Tyburn Gallows and vengeance from beyond the grave—a tale of Davy Garrick, the actor, and grim justice visited upon the man who betrayed his friend the highwayman.

THE DUNWICH HORROR, *by H. P. Lovecraft*

The author of "The Call of Cthulhu" rises to new heights of terror and horror in this powerful story—a tale in which the horror creeps and grows, and finally bursts full-blown upon the reader.

THE SHADOW OF A NIGHTMARE, *by Donald Wandrei*

Tucked away in a corner of the Himalayas was a strange country, inhabited entirely by madmen; and from a manuscript that found its way to the outer world from this Country of the Mad stalked forth nightmare and horror.

THE LAUGHING THING, *by G. G. Pendarves*

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(Continued from page 422)

which I believe is one of his best. I have read *When the Green Star Waned, The Eternal Conflict* and *The Dark Lore.* I wish you would try to get more of his stories. I greatly admire them, and a lot of my friends would also like more of his stories."

From Schoolfield, Virginia, writes B. Lemons: "I just had to write to you to let you know how I like your magazine. I have been reading it about two years. I wouldn't give it for any other magazine on the market. I can't wait for it to come out each month, so I wish you would print it twice a month. My favorite writers are Seabury Quinn, H. P. Lovecraft, Edmond Hamilton and Eli Colter. Seabury Quinn with his little doctor, Jules de Grandin, can't be beaten."

"If there ever was a magazine that is different," writes Mrs. F. D. Simmons, of St. Louis, "yours is it. I have been reading WEIRD TALES for two years and I would like to see stories reprinted from your back numbers. Seabury Quinn and Edmond Hamilton are my favorite authors."

"I just finished reading the reprint, *When the Green Star Waned,*" writes Chester Dix, of Shamokin, Pennsylvania, "and am wildly enthusiastic about it. I hope you will continue publishing some of your earlier stories, as I have been reading your wonderful magazine only three years. Also I wish to compliment Seabury Quinn; I consider his best *The Blood-Flower* and *The Jewel of Seven Stones.*"

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in the January issue, as shown by your votes, was Seabury Quinn's *The Black Master.* This was closely pressed for first place by Bassett Morgan's fantastic and beautiful tale of the Northern Lights, *Bimini.*

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The Immortal Hand

(Continued from page 331)

of amazement escaped our lips. In place of the opening through which we had passed not an hour since, there stood facing us a stretch of solid wall. And not a newly built wall, either. The mortar was set as hard as iron; long festoons of dusty cobwebs hung from the discolored bricks, showing that they had not been disturbed for ages.

We could only stare at each other speechlessly.

"Were we dreaming or drunk when we passed through that door last night?" asked Kinnaird after a pause that seemed to have lasted hours.

Moved by a sudden thought, I stepped to the window and threw it open. Leaning out, I looked along the outside surface of the wall. Our room abutted on a vacant site, and where the room of the previous night had been there was nothing but empty air! But, looking closer, I perceived unmistakable traces that the house had once formed a wing of a much larger building, which had been demolished. I turned my eyes downward; stared —rubbed my eyes—and stared again.

The sun was rising bright and clear behind the peaked gables of the surrounding houses, and by its light I saw that I was looking down on the serried rows of broken and time-stained stones which are all that remain to mark the site of New Place —the last home of William Shakespeare.

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The People of Pan

(Continued from page 305)

kirtle grotesquely askew. He paused, reverently, and turned the body on its back. The expression on the face was quite peaceful, as though a natural and quiet death had overtaken the victim.

As he rose from his task, his face being near the floor's level, he saw, along it, innumerable other bodies, lying about in varying postures. He stood upright and looked toward the image of the Goat. Bodies lay heaped in great mounds about the curved, animal legs; more bodies lay heaped before the sanctuary.

Awestruck, but, now that he knew, somewhat steadied by this wholesale calamity which had overtaken the peaceful People of Pan, he now moved quietly forward at an even pace.

Something lay across the altar.

Picking his way carefully among the massed corpses he mounted the sanctuary steps. Across the altar lay the body of the priestess, her dead arms outstretched toward the image of the Goat. She had died in her appointed place, in the very attitude of making supplication for her people who had died about her. Grosvenor, greatly moved, looked closely into the once beautiful face. It was still strangely beautiful and placid, noble in death; and upon it was an expression of profound peace. Pan had taken his priestess and his people to Himself. . . .

He had slightly raised the mummified body, and as he replaced it reverently back across the altar, something fluttered from it to his feet. He picked up a bit of parchmentlike material. There was writing on it. Holding it, he passed back through the sanctuary to the room behind, where there would be a clearer light. The rooms were empty. Nothing had been disturbed.

The parchment was addressed to him. He spelled out, carefully, the antique, beautifully formed characters of the old literary Greek:

"Hail to thee, and farewell, O stranger. I, Clytemnestra, priestess of Pan the Merciful, address thee, that thou mayest understand. Thou art freed from thy oath of silence.

"At the change of the seasons the sacrifice failed. Our search revealed no living thing to offer to our god. Pan takes His vengeance. My people abandon this life for Acheron, for upon us has Pan loosed the poisonous airs of the underworld. As I write, I faint, and I am the last to go.

"Thine, then, O kind barbarian, of the seed of them that drove from Kuba the men of Hispaniola, are the treasures of Pan's People. Of them take freely. I go now to my appointed place, at the altar of the Great Pan who gathers us to Himself. In peace and love, O barbarian of the North Continent, I greet thee. In peace and love, farewell."

Grosvenor placed the parchment in his breast-pocket. He was profoundly affected. He sat for a long time on the white stone couch. At last he rose and passed reflectively out into the underground gardens. The great flares of natural gas burned steadily at the tops of the irregular pipes.

At once he was consumed in wonder. How could these continue to burn without there having occurred a great conflagration? The amount of free gas sufficient to asphyxiate and mummify the entire population of this underground community would have ignited in one heaving cataclysm which would have blown Saona out of the water!

But—perhaps that other gas was not inflammable. Then the true explanation occurred to him abruptly. The destructive gas was ***heavier than the air***. It would lie along the ground,

and be gradually dissipated as the fresh air from the pipes leading above diluted its deadly intensity. It would not mount to the tops of these illuminating pipes. The shortest of them, as he gaged it, was sixty feet high. Of course, he would never know, positively. . . .

He looked about him through the lovely gardens, now *his* paradise. All about were the evidences of long neglect. Unshorn grass waved like standing hay in the light breeze which seemed to come from nowhere. Rotting fruit lay in heaps under the sapodilla trees.

He plucked a handful of the drying grass as long as his arm, and began to twist it into the tough string of the Antilles' grass-rope. He made five or six feet of the string. He retraced his steps slowly back to the room where he had read his last message from the priestess of Pan. He passed the string through the handles of a massive golden fruit jar, emptied out the liquefying mass of corrupt fruit which lay sodden in its bowl.

He slung the heavy jar on his back, returned through the sanctuary, threaded his way among the heaped bodies, began to walk back through the temple toward the anteroom.

From across that vast room he looked back. Through the dim perspective the monstrous figure of the Goat seemed to exult. With a slight shudder Charles Grosvenor passed out onto the platform. He grasped the handrail, planted his feet on the first round of the ladder, and began his long, weary climb to the top. . . .

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The City of Iron Cubes

(Continued from page 324)

long years. At last, frightened to desperation, she must have done something which opened the doors. Is it not so, Aien?" He leaned forward affectionately to pat her hand.

I had become so absorbed in his story of the happenings on that far-away world that I had lost track of the happenings in our immediate vicinity. Which, perhaps, accounts for the fact that it was not until he had finished the tale that I realized that for the past few minutes a faint hissing sound had been piercing the partly wrecked walls of the cabin. It was a sound as of a giant blow-torch cutting through metal. Although I had heard it only once before, I was sure that my faculties interpreted it correctly.

Across the valley, the last visitors from beyond the stars were cutting their way out!

AIEN and the professor became conscious of the disturbance nearly at the same instant, and we all rushed to the tiny window, straining our eyes to behold the fierce cutting flame which we knew must be there. Even from our distant position it was easy to see that our suspicions were well founded. As we watched, the flame completed its chiseling through the iron wall of the eighth cube and the heated metal fell outward to clang brazenly against the earth.

"Will they be friendly, do you think, Doctor?" I whispered. "Or will it be—otherwise?"

"I don't know," he replied, "but from the attitude of our visitor I should believe—otherwise."

Her head bowed between her shoulders, Aien was staring hopelessly at the black hole in the side of the cube. In her attitude was dejection so complete and absolute that one felt she had abandoned all hope. I have seen soldiers stand so when alone and friendless they faced an overwhelming rush of gray-clad, bayonet-waving figures.

Not knowing definitely what to fear, I could not give up so easily. "How much time will we have?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I don't know. It is possible that they may not discover us until night. It depends on how many there are of them.

"You stay here and care for Aien," he ordered. "I have something that must be done at once." And without wasting further time he left us, descending, I noticed, through a trap-door in the floor of the cabin which had previously escaped my attention.

We were alone, Aien and I; alone, that is, with the exception of the black hole which yawned in the side of the metal mountain a scant half-mile away. Hoping to arouse her from her despondency, I took her by the hand and gently twisted her away from the window.

The gray eyes which stared into my own were abstracted and fixed.

"Aien, Aien," I entreated her, "what does it matter? Come, look at me?" I placed my hands on her shoulders and bent my head nearly to a level with her eyes. Automatically, she became aware of the contact of my hands and shrugged her shoulders to throw them off.

I shook her gently as one chastises a friend. Instantly she responded and her expression grew proud and haughty. For an interval our glances clashed like two rivers of molten steel meeting in a single fiery channel. The gray eyes became suddenly

more fierce and then, as I did not relax my grasp, grew scornful.

Yet I would not loosen the clasp of my hands on her shoulders. Indeed I could not if I would. Between us the invisible magnetic current of life pulsed fiercely. I knew that despite herself she must feel it even as I.

For an instant she struggled frantically while I, scarce knowing what I was doing, drew her toward me. Then she relaxed, and, imprisoned in my arms, ceased to fight.

It was the relaxation which brought me to my senses. It was incredible. I had met her but a few short hours ago and now—I knew that in another second I must have kissed her.

I released her, and bowing my head humbly murmured, "I beg your pardon," forgetful that my language was meaningless to her. Yet I think she understood, perhaps from my attitude, for her scornful glance melted and her hand sought my own to clasp it for a brief second ere it dropped away. Then we turned to the cube, I, for one, careless of what might have happened during our period of abstraction. At least I knew she had forgiven me.

I reached for a pair of field glasses and focused them upon the entrance. Together we waited for what was to take place.

IT MUST have been at least a half-hour before we noticed any movement. Then a man appeared in the entrance with his hand shading his eyes from the fierce glare of the sunlight. For a long minute he stood there, framed in the metal doorway, and I wondered what were his thoughts. It must have been a marvelous sensation to be the first to look upon a new and strange world, a world which was awaiting a conqueror; to be the first to step from space upon the soil of an unknown land. Dangerous he might be, and

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an eternal enemy, but I envied him the glory of that single instant.

Even as we watched, it was over; for with a graceful movement he raised his hand high overhead in silent salute. Then he turned and vanished into the interior.

I turned back to the cabin and secured a rifle and a bandolier of shells. It was as well to be prepared for whatever might take place.

When I returned to the window a file of men were pouring from the entranceway. They wore tight-fitting clothes of an unusual and virtually invisible shade of gray. Under the arm of each man was a long tube, shaped somewhat like a rifle, but with a barrel two or three times the size. Although I was ignorant of its purpose, I assumed it to be a weapon.

Apparently all had received their orders beforehand; for, without a sound that we could hear, they formed into little groups of three or four and disappeared into the surrounding territory. Following them were other men, dozens of them, who behaved in the same startling manner. I could admire them for their skill and the ability with which they performed the maneuver even while I feared for what their near approach might mean to us.

The strangers who were leaving the cube now were no longer armed, but instead carried tools; strange tools of an inconceivable utility. These men were workers, not fighters. Even as I watched, they commenced the assembling of a huge and unwieldy apparatus in an open space before the cube. They worked swiftly and with a minimum of orders, each man performing some particular task. A group of head engineers or overseers left the cube next and stopped to watch the assembling. From their reserved and dignified appearance it was not difficult to deduce that they were the chiefs of the enterprise, whatever it might be.

In a few minutes the scouts began to report back. A drab figure would arise from the earth as a veritable shadow-man materializing from nothingness. The scout would incline his head briefly, speak a few words and vanish as he had come.

A few minutes later two soldiers, for such these men must be, came into view carrying between them a burden wrapped in a white cloth. I looked quickly at Aien. To me the nature of their burden was obvious at once. They had discovered the entrance to the seventh cube, had penetrated to the interior and were carrying the corpse of the old inventor.

Aien was regarding the scene with interest, and with a trace of fear, but there was no indication that she had guessed the contents of the white-wrapped package.

The leaders were watching the approaching soldiers with intense curiosity. As I watched, one of them stepped forward and directed the scouts to lay down their burden. He stared into the face of the shrouded figure and then, to my disgust, spat upon the uncovered features.

Then he evidently asked the guard a question, for the fellow shook his head in negation. A commotion at the entrance to the cube temporarily distracted my attention. They were bringing out a man, obviously a prisoner, for his hands were bound behind him.

At the orders of the leader, they led the captive across the open space to confront him with the corpse. He stared at the dead features and then started in surprize and grief. Then he stood with drooping head as before. His attitude and indifference appeared to enrage the leader, for he motioned back the guards and advanced upon the prisoner.

Aien, whom I had disregarded in my excitement, chose that moment to pluck me by the sleeve and mutely

request the loan of my glasses. Foolishly I gave them to her.

The man, as I could see with my naked eye, was regarding the approaching leader with an air of defiant hopelessness. So quickly it occurred that I had scarcely time to gasp before the lean hands of the leader closed around the throat of the captive and throttled him before our very eyes!

Aien screamed, dropped the glasses and bolted for the door. I sprang after her and caught her on the threshold. For a moment we fought fiercely before I succeeded in dragging her back to the safety of the room. Seemingly bent upon attempting a rescue of the man attacked, she fought as one demented, and it required my entire strength to subdue her. Then she collapsed on the floor, sobbing and crying in despair.

The earth chose that moment to turn and twist under our feet. Instantly I thought of the arrival of another cube and then realized that this time it was a true earth tremor. The entire floor of the plateau shifted and settled. The shock was not a bad one, but, combined with the affair of the night before, it was sufficient to complete the wrecking of our roof. Before I had time to move, the entire expanse of heavy thatch sagged drunkenly and collapsed on our heads. I was caught, pinned down beneath the wreckage.

Strangely enough I felt no pain, although I had been felled to the ground by the initial blow. I realized that the force of the fall had been broken by the stout wooden table which stood in the center of the room and that, unless the tremor increased in force, we were safe from further harm.

But what had become of the doctor and Aien?

In much less time than it takes to tell all this, the quake passed and I heard it rumbling away, echoing and re-echoing into the circle of moun-

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tains surrounding us. I struggled fiercely to free myself but found that my strength was insufficient. Forgetful of the necessity for silence, I shouted again and again.

A queer feeling that someone was watching me at last silenced my cries.

The resulting quiet was uncanny. I endeavored to twist my head to one side in an effort to see what had impressed me. The effort was futile. I was pinned fast as though held in a vise.

Then into my circle of vision moved a pair of legs. They were strange legs and I was sure that they belonged neither to Aien nor the professor. They were gray-clad, the very color worn by the shadow-scouts. Back and forth they moved before my eyes, and then, as their owner stepped back to catch a better view, I saw him in his entirety.

It was indeed one of the enemy—a spare man of medium height and with cold, cruel eyes. Seeing that I was conscious, he addressed several words to me. I shook my head to show that I did not understand. He leaned his weapon against the wall and strode across the room to me.

So, after all, they are going to be friendly, I thought, as he knelt down beside me. It was only when his long, narrow fingers closed around my throat that I remembered the fate of the strange prisoner. So it was to be that! Of course in a world which was perishing through lack of air, strangulation would be the most cruel death.

Gently, almost lovingly, the fingers tightened around my throat. My breath was cut off. Everything turned black. It was so easy to die! As from a great distance I was aware of an explosion. The hands around my throat relaxed and I lapsed into a cool and quiet unconsciousness.

The catastrophe, and the astounding secret of the origin of the men from the iron cubes, will be related in the concluding chapters of this story in next month's WEIRD TALES.

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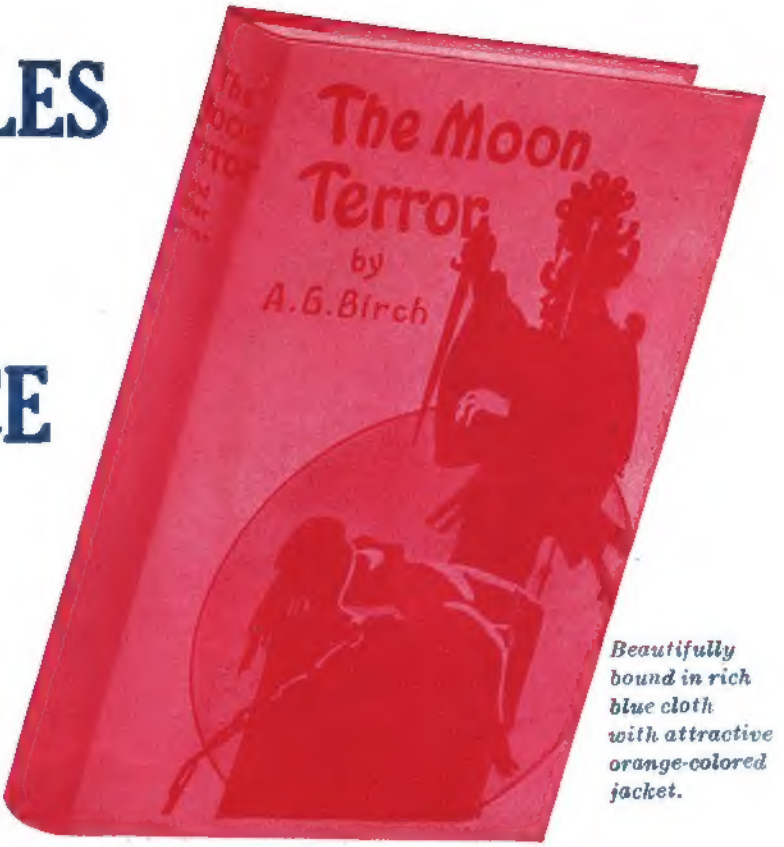

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OOZE, by Anthony M. Rud, ***tells of a biologist who removed the growth limitations from an amoeba, and the amazing catastrophe that ensued.***

PENELOPE, by Vincent Starrett, ***is a fascinating tale of the star Penelope, and the fantastic thing that happened when the star was in perihelion.***

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It Was the Greatest Shock of My Life to Hear Her Play

—how had she found time to practice?

"WELL, Jim—I told you I had a surprise for you!"

She beamed at her husband, delighted to see how surprised—and pleased—he was.

And I was astonished, too. Quite casually she had gone to the piano, sat down—and played! Played beautifully—though I had never seen her touch a piano before. Neither of us could conceal our curiosity.

"How did you ever do it?" her husband asked. "When did you find time to practice?"

"And who is your teacher?" I added.

"Wait, wait!" she laughed. "One question at a time. I have no teacher, that is, no private teacher, and I do my practicing between dishes."

"No teacher?"

"No—I learned to play the piano an entirely *new* way—*without* a teacher. You see, all my life I wanted to play some musical instrument. I thought I'd never learn how to play, though—for I haven't much time to spare, and I thought it would take long hours of hard work. And I thought it would be expensive, too."

"Well, it *is* hard work, and it is expensive," I said. "Why, I have a sister . . ."

"I know," she laughed, "but *I* learned to play the piano through the new simplified method. Some time ago I saw an announcement of the U. S. School of Music. It told how a young man had learned to play the piano during his spare time without a teacher. I found that thousands of others had learned to play their favorite musical instruments in this same delightful, easy way, and so I decided to enroll for a course in piano playing."

"But you didn't tell me anything about it," Jim said.

"Well, you see, that was my big surprise. Ever since I received my first lesson I've been practicing by myself—during the day while you've been away at business. I turned my spare moments between housekeeping and shopping into something pleasant and profitable."

"If you planned to surprise me—you've certainly succeeded," said Jim.

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